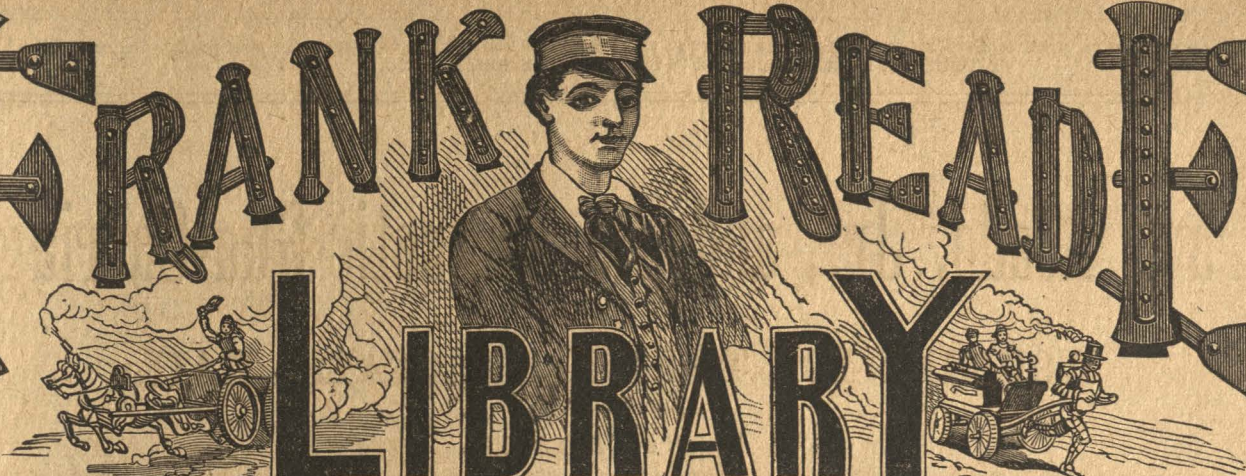


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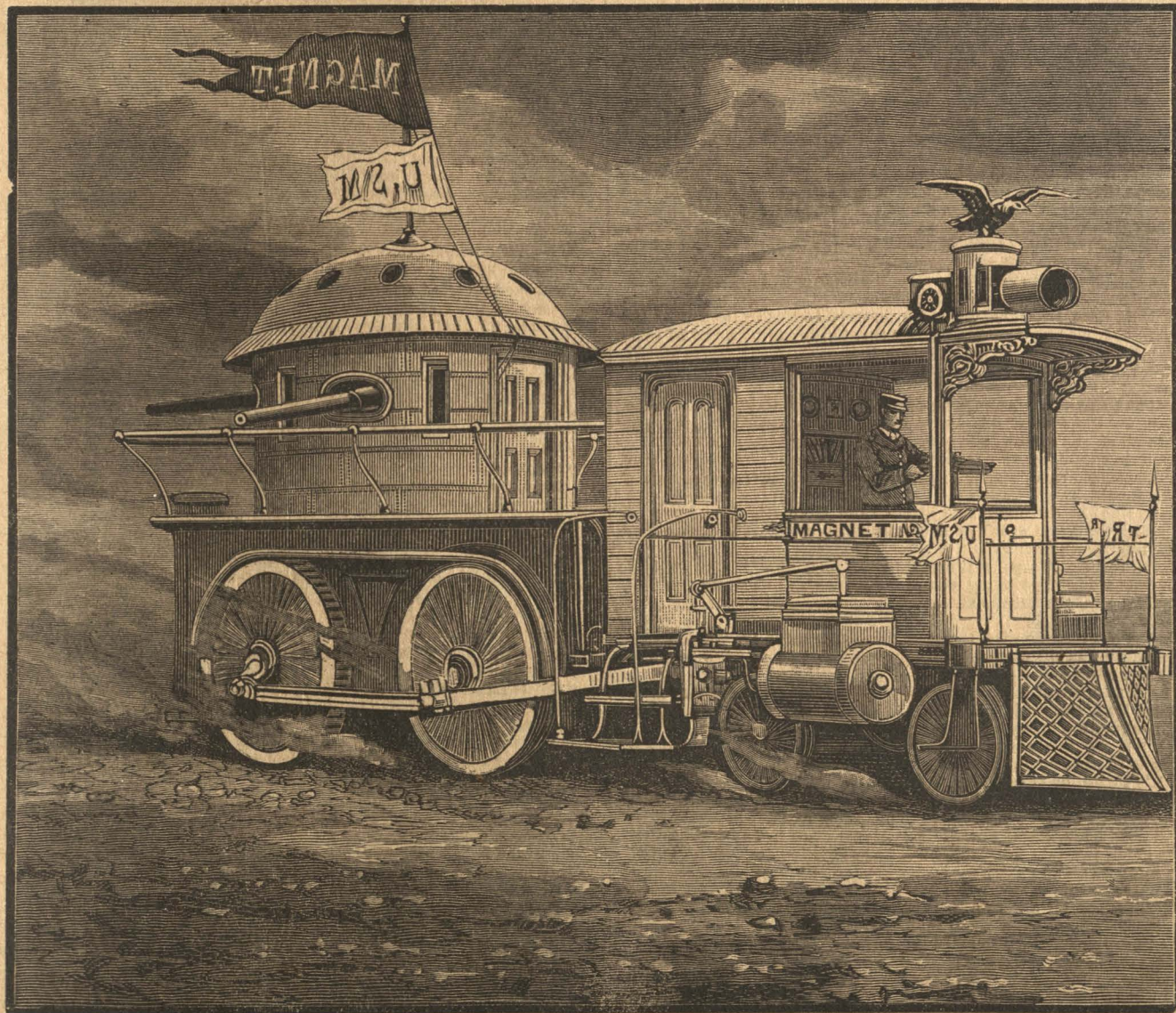
Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York, N. Y., Post Office, October 5, 1892.

No. 60. { COMPLETE. } FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 34 & 35 NORTH MOORE STREET, NEW YORK. { PRICE 5 CENTS. } Vol. III  
New York, November 11, 1893. ISSUED WEEKLY.

Entered according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1893, by FRANK TOUSEY, in the office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington, D. C.

Frank Reade, Jr., and His Magnetic Gun-Carriage; or,  
WORKING FOR THE U. S. MAIL.

By "NONAME."





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# Frank Reade, Jr., and His Magnetic Gun-Carriage;

## OR, WORKING FOR THE UNITED STATES MAIL.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Frank Reade, Jr., With His Air Ship in Asia," "Frank Reade, Jr., in the Far West," etc., etc.

### CHAPTER I.

#### A \$50,000 MAIL ROBBERY.

THE Tenth National Bank of San Francisco was in the habit of sending by registered packages large sums of money to the Michigan National Bank of Chicago.

Some time ago they made a shipment of \$50,000 in bills of the one thousand denomination, inclosed in a sealed envelope, and the mail pouch arrived in the Chicago General Post Office apparently untampered with.

It was opened by clerks Doe and Roe, who, in checking off, discovered that the valuable package alluded to above was missing.

The loss was immediately reported to the superintendent, and a thorough search was made for it.

The Registry Department was turned topsy-turvy, no one was allowed to enter or depart until all the clerks had been searched, and every nook and corner carefully examined and overhauled.

Unfortunately the search was fruitless.

As soon as the postmaster heard of the robbery he notified Chief Inspector East of Washington, and several detectives, or "inspectors," as they are called in the Secret Service, were put to work to ferret out the mystery of the missing package.

Two of the inspectors began tracing the pouch which contained the envelope from the time it was received in the post office by the two clerks back to the post office in San Francisco, where it was delivered to one of the railway postal clerks.

It was proven that the robbery did not occur in Chicago, and all the clerks in the general office were exonerated.

The San Francisco bankers were notified, and telegraphed back that the package left them in good order.

If this were true, the thief must have had a duplicate key to the pouch lock, as only two keys were supposed to be in existence—one in San Francisco and the other in Chicago.

The robbery therefore must have occurred between the two big cities.

Although as much secrecy as possible was maintained about the matter by the federal officers, the prying newspaper reporters got points about the matter, and gave the foregoing facts publicity.

Among the many who read the account was a noted inventor of marvelous electrical, magnetic and mechanical contrivances, named Frank Reade, Jr.

He resided in the flourishing little city of Readestown, and was regarded all the world over as one of the most remarkable young men of the nineteenth century.

Frank resided in a palatial mansion.

He was a dashing-looking young fellow, with fine features, and an athletic figure, the most extraordinary courage, and one of the kindest of hearts.

On the morning he read the foregoing account of the \$50,000 mail robbery, he was sitting in his library, when there sounded a tremendous crash of broken glass.

The next moment a negro of diminutive size came diving through a window from the yard, and landed in a heap on the floor among the fragments of the broken frame and shattered panes.

Startled by this unexpected event, Frank sprang to his feet, and glancing in amazement at the coon, he exclaimed:

"It's Pomp, by thunder!"

The individual alluded to scrambled hastily to his big feet, and a broad grin overspread his comical mug, as he replied:

"S'peaks it am, Marse Frank. But if dis chile hadn't a-come froo dat winder, it would have only been de remains ob dis yere niggah."

"What was the matter?"

"Barney done try ter break my head wif a bale stick, jist kase I wake him out ob a nap in his chair by buildin' a bon-fire under it, sah."

At this moment there sounded a dismal howl out in the yard.

"Howly floy," roared the man's voice, "I'll be afther goin' ter bed shtandin' up fer a week. Will some wan show me that nagur till I bate a lung out av him!"

And the door flew open, and a red-headed Irishman rushed in.

He was flourishing a club in his hand, his usually good natured, freckled face wore a look of anguish, and he glared around the room with an intense longing to pulverize the coon.

Both Pomp and Barney O'Shea were old friends of Frank's, who invariably assisted him to construct his inventions, and went with him on the hazardous journeys he made in them.

"Hold on there, boys," cried Frank, sternly. "I want you to stop this nonsense! You are forever playing those confounded practical jokes upon each other, and I'm sick and tired of it."

"Masther Frank," said the Celt, imploringly, "it's only wan t'ump I do be afther wantin' ter hit that black-an'-tan Bulgarian, an' I'll go ter me grave wif an aisy conscience."

"No! No! You must stop this, I say."

"Be heavens, I'll throw a fit, if I don't kill ther nagur!"

Pomp pulled a razor out of his pocket.

Opening it, he remarked grimly:

"I ain't runnin' away, honey. Come ahead!"

"Will you stop your fooling?" cried Frank, in exasperated tones, "or do you both want me to quarrel with you?"

They saw that the inventor was getting angry, so Pomp replaced his razor in his pocket, and Barney flung the bale stick out through the broken window, and said:

"Faix it's not meself would foight wid you, Masther Frank."

"Dat am jes' what I say," added Pomp.

"Then shake hands with each other."

The coon and the Celt complied with such fervor that they almost mashed the bones in each other's fingers.

Pomp had received several slight cuts in coming through the window, and the stern of Barney's clothing was considerably burned, but they made no further reference to their injuries, and Frank said to them:

"I've got some news of importance for you, boys."

"Indade!" replied Barney, interestedly, "an' what moight that be?"

"You know I have just completed a new magnetic engine?"

"De Magnet?" queried Pomp.

"Yes; I have a use for her."

"Shure an' it's plazed I am ter hear it."

"Wha' yo' gwine ter do wif her, Marse Frank?"

"Work for the United States Mail."

"How am dat?"

"This newspaper item explains the case."

And Frank read to his friends the account given at the opening of our story, and then drew a letter from his pocket.

Barney and Pomp became very much interested.

Glancing curiously at the letter, Barney asked:

"What is that, sor?"

"A letter from Chief Inspector East, of Washington. He wants us to employ one of my overland engines to aid his detectives to recover the stolen package."

"Fo' de Lawd's sake," said Pomp. "How we's gwine ter use it dat way?"

"I don't know yet. But the chief makes me a tempting financial offer to do the work, and says he is going to send one of his men named Jim Fay here to explain matters. If I conclude to accept his offer, the inspector is to accompany us."

"An' will yez go?"

"Very likely. We have got the machine, and no use for it. This offer opens a field of adventure for us that we all want. Ah! There's a ring at the door bell. Who can it be?"

They listened, and a servant came in with a visiting card.

"Mr. James Fay, of Washington, sir," she announced.

"The detective!" said Frank. "Show him in."

In a few moments the girl ushered a very large, muscular man into the room—a person clad in a plain black suit, with a clean shaven face and close cut hair, keen eyes, and a quiet air.

"Mr. Reade, I believe?" he said inquiringly, glancing at Frank.

"That is my name, sir. Come in. I received a letter from Mr.



East about you. These are my confidential friends, Barney and Pomp."

"Yes, I've heard of them before," said the inspector as he strode in and sat down. "You are aware of the object of my call?"

"I am," promptly replied Frank. "Please state your case."

"To be brief, I was one of the two men sent to San Francisco," said Fay, "and while there I discovered how the bank's money was stolen. The man who locked the mail-pouch in San Francisco post office carried the key home in his pocket. That night his dissolute son robbed him of it and boarded the train upon which the pouches were shipped. Secretly gaining access to the mail car and chloroforming the clerk unseen, he opened the pouch, subtracted the bank's package, and locking the bag he escaped. The railway mail clerk did not know that he had been drugged. But he admitted to me that he had slept while on duty guarding the pouches."

"Well?" asked Frank, as the inspector paused.

"I interviewed the man who had locked the bag. He admitted that he awoke that night, or rather early the following morning, and caught his son in the act of replacing the stolen key in the pocket of his clothing that laid on the bedroom chair. The young man fled. His unfortunate father is arrested and lodged in prison. He will fare hard unless his guilty son is captured and confesses that the old gentleman was innocent of complicity in the deed."

"Then you intend to capture the son?"

"Yes. Dick Ross dared not remain in the city. He fled eastward, and I discovered he has joined a lawless gang who make a specialty of robbing the mails in transit on the railroads through Montana."

"What did you design to do with my new magnetic gun carriage?"

"Run down the mail robbers, break up their gang, recover the stolen money, and protect the mails in general until the gang in question is exterminated."

"I like your plan, Mr. Fay, and shall attempt it."

"Good. I'll meet you in Chicago one week from to-day. Bring along your invention, and we'll see if we can't put a stop to this rascality and capture Dick Ross."

And after some further conversation with the celebrated inventor, the inspector took his departure.

## CHAPTER II.

### CHASING A RUNAWAY.

THREE days afterward Frank and his two friends had the Magnet equipped for her wild, adventurous journey across the continent, and boarding the machine they started for Chicago in her.

It was a custom of the newspapers to apprise the public of the fact that Frank Reade, Jr., had invented a new machine every time he brought out one of these peculiar contrivances.

Hence the chief inspector in Washington was well aware at the time he wrote to the inventor that he had this engine in readiness, and as Frank had assisted the government on other occasions there had been no hesitancy in calling upon him in this case.

The magnetic gun-carriage was a strictly new departure for the inventor to attempt, as he had never before utilized magnetic power as a means of propulsion.

In appearance the machine was very singular.

It was mounted on eight wheels, which like the rest of the engine, were made of that strong light metal called aluminum.

The front was protected by a cow-catcher, the forward wheels turned on a pivot to steer the affair and the hind wheels were coupled to the armatures of a tremendous electro-magnet to drive it.

A square compartment occupied the forward part of the engine, with a powerful electric search light mounted on the roof.

This compartment was divided into two sections.

At the front was a room with large windows for the steersman, while in back was a small room for sleeping purposes.

Upon the raised platform of the hind wheels stood a turret from three sides of which projected the muzzles of three pneumatic guns, while the shell was broken by slots and bull's-eyes.

In this room the cooking and dining utensils were kept, besides the arms, ammunition, water, provisions and other stores.

Frank was proud of this machine.

He had discovered that magnetism could be made as useful for power as electricity was for motive force.

The electro-magnet was of the ordinary kind, made on a large scale and operated by an electric current derived from storage batteries which also operated the search-light, the incandescent lamps in the rooms and other arrangements where an electric current was needed.

This form of magnet was necessary for the following reason:

A magnet when freshly magnetized is powerful, but gradually falls off in strength until it reaches a point at which its strength remains constant, called the point of saturation.

They are tested by the weight the armature will bear without breaking away, and a 2-ounce magnet will sustain a weight of 3 pounds 2 ounces, or about 25 times its own weight.

A 100 pound one will only sustain 271 pounds—less than 3 times its own weight, and thus small magnets are proven the strongest.

Consequently, if ordinary magnets were used, it would require so many small ones that the machine could not carry their weight.

Frank explained this to his companions, as the machine ran smoothly along a hard road bordering the railroad track.

The afternoon was well advanced, and to while away the time, the darky took up an old banjo, and the Celt an antiquated fiddle with which they struck up a lively tune.

A train with many passengers aboard passed them going from

Readestown, and a cheer pealed from every one when they saw Frank's magnetic machine.

The young inventor took it as a defiance, and pulling a lever that added speed to the wheels, he drove the Magnet ahead.

At that moment the machine had been making no more than twenty miles an hour, while the train was going along at twice that speed, and swiftly passed her.

But as soon as Frank increased the speed of his invention it flew ahead, and swiftly overtook the train.

Another pull at the lever sent her rushing on at the rate of a mile a minute, and the train was left behind despite the engineer putting on every pound of steam the locomotive could carry.

It was now Frank's turn to feel jubilant.

He had no desire to keep up the furious pace, however, and therefore slackened speed till the train reached him.

"You had a bigger contract on your hands than you bargained for," shouted the young inventor, smilingly.

"I thought I could beat that wonder," the engineer replied, as he sized up the Magnet. "I never was so badly sold before!"

Frank permitted the train to pass him.

It soon vanished around a curve.

Pomp went into the turret, and lifting up a trap-door in the floor, he made an examination of the batteries.

They were properly charged, and the machinery in the same space, operated by the electro magnet, was working rapidly.

Barney passed out on the platform with a field-glass in his hand.

Glancing back the way they came from, he suddenly caught sight of a locomotive and a freight car come tearing along at a tremendous rate of speed after the train that had passed.

Amazed at the furious pace at which the engine was going, when the other train on the same track was such a short distance ahead, the Irishman peered at it through his glass.

A startled exclamation escaped him.

"Howly Heavens!" he gasped. "There's no wan on that locomotive!"

And he told the truth!

The engine was running away!

A veritable chill passed over Barney, for he realized that if the locomotive reached the train ahead, it would smash into it.

A wreck and terrible disaster would ensue.

People would be wounded, maimed and killed.

Into the wheelroom dashed Barney to tell Frank, just as the runaway locomotive reached the Magnet.

"What's the matter?" demanded the startled inventor.

"Begob, there's a locomotive an' car widout a sowl on it!"

Instantly Frank divined the truth.

He glanced at the roaring engine as it thundered past, making at least sixty miles an hour, and as quick as a flash started the Magnet flying after it.

He knew that the salvation of the people in the train ahead depended upon him stopping the runaway, and made up his mind to do it if there was a way to.

Ahead the locomotive rushed like lightning, the Magnet in hot pursuit, and the curve was reached.

For a moment it seemed to Frank that the locomotive would fly off the rails, as it rushed around the bend at that awful rate of speed and heeled far over upon its side.

A wild shriek arose from the wheels on one side, which alone clung to the track, but in a moment more the engine had safely made the curve and went rumbling off on a down grade with accelerating speed.

Into the wheel room hastened Pomp, wondering why on earth Frank was driving the Magnet along so swiftly.

A cloud of dust arose around the machine, and Frank pulled the lever all the way over.

The wheels fairly buzzed like circular saws, and if there had been an obstruction in the way, a dreadful catastrophe might have occurred to the three friends.

Like an arrow from the bow shot the magnetic machine, and under the augmented impulse given her, she rapidly bore down on the runaway.

Slowly but surely she gained in the mad, furious race, but the train ahead appeared to view.

"By heavens, I'm afraid we can't reach that locomotive before it comes up with the train!" panted Frank.

"Then it's a terrible collision ther papers'll be afther mintionin' in ther marnin'," gloomily observed Barney.

"Kain't yo' put on mo' speed, Marse Frank?"

"No; the Magnet is doing her level best."

"Faix, it's gainin' we are, an' fasht in ther bargain," hopefully said Barney. "But we haven't toime ter win."

Frank pondered a moment, and an idea suggested itself to his mind, and he said to Barney:

"Take the steering wheel, I'm going back in the turret."

"But, begorry, yer not givin' up?"

"No, no! When I yell, you stop the Magnet and turn her around."

Wondering what plan Frank had in view, the Irishman nodded, and grasped the spokes.

Frank then passed into the rear room.

Here he opened the breach of one of the guns.

Standing upon a rack were a number of huge, cartridge-shaped brass projectiles, loaded with an explosive compound of terrific strength.



Shoving one of them into the gun, Frank turned a wheel at the side, charging the air reservoir, and yelled to the Irishman:

"Now! Stop her! Turn her!"

"Shtop it is!" replied Barney.

He swung the Magnet around and stopped the mechanism.

No sooner was this done, when Frank aimed the gun at the driving wheels of the flying locomotive.

"Far better to ruin the engine than let it kill those people," he muttered, grimly. "I think I can make the shot."

He saw that the people on the train were aware of the peril they were in, for many of them crowded the platforms and steps, and were looking back out the windows.

The engineer had put on every pound of steam his engine could generate in a wild effort to run away from the monster that was roaring after him.

It was quite useless, however.

The passenger train could go only half as fast as the other.

It was swiftly bearing down upon them, and in the course of a few minutes was bound to crash into the rear car.

Having sighted the gun, Frank made due allowance for the speeding of the locomotive, and discharged the shot.

There came a heavy thud of escaping air, and the cartridge emitted a wild howl as it flew through the air.

It landed and burst with a thunderous report.

But it missed the locomotive.

Landing behind it, the shot blew a big hole in the ground.

### CHAPTER III.

#### OFF FOR MONTANA.

A CRY of dismay burst involuntarily from Frank and his companions when they saw that the shot missed its mark.

"I didn't allow enough for the speeding of the locomotive," the young inventor muttered, in horrified tones.

"Aim farder ahead, Marse Frank!" yelled Pomp from the wheel-room.

"Faith, it's too late ter throy another shot," roared Barney.

He saw that the runaway was in dangerous proximity to the train ahead, and thought there was no salvation for it.

Not so with Frank, however.

While there was life there was hope.

No sooner had he seen the first shot miss its mark when he sprang to the next gun and rapidly loaded it.

He did not lose an instant.

Never before had he ever loaded and fired a gun so quickly.

Away sped a second projectile while Barney was talking of it being useless to hope to do it.

Boom! it roared.

And it hit its mark!

A terrible crash followed.

The runaway locomotive was smashed to fragments, and the freight car attached to it was torn to pieces.

Up in the air and in all directions flew the debris.

The passenger train went on with many glasses in the rear car demolished, and many abrasions at the end.

But no one was hurt.

The runaway had been swept from the track.

It was one of the most singular means of rescue on record, and the wonderful pneumatic gun had proven its immense utility in more ways than one.

Every one on the train was amazed.

As soon as they recovered from their stupefaction, a tremendous cheer for Frank and his friends was given.

Barney and Pomp were delighted.

When Frank joined them they warmly congratulated him.

"Be heavens," said Barney, "I couldn't a-fired a betther shot meself!"

"Marse Frank, Ise proud ob yo'," said the coon.

"To prevent any more accidents occurring on that track," said Frank, "I'd better send word back to Readestown about what I did, and have them send some men to repair the tracks blown up when the locomotive went to pieces."

He opened a box and took out a telegraph key, sounder and relay, all fastened upon one small board.

Alighting from the Magnet, he climbed up the nearest telegraph pole beside the track, tapped the wire, and as he understood telegraphy, he sent the message.

A reply came back that the matter would be attended to at once, whereupon Frank descended to the ground again.

The saved train had come to a pause, but Frank signaled the engineer to go ahead again.

"We don't want to hear their thanks," he said to his two friends as he joined them.

A few moments afterwards the Magnet resumed her journey at a moderate rate of speed, and as the shadows of night began to fall, Pomp, who was a good cook prepared supper.

Several hours later the watch was divided.

Frank and Barney turned in and Pomp remained on duty.

The Magnet rolled ahead easily on her flexible springs, and as the sky had become obscured by clouds the coon pulled one of the levers starting the search-light.

A tremendous shaft was flung a mile or more ahead by the powerful reflector, lighting up the road as if by day.

Pomp fell into a meditative mood, and forgot his surroundings to

such an extent that the hour went by when Barney was to relieve him of his trick at the wheel.

The Irishman had promptly awakened in the back room, however, and peering through the open door, he saw the coon standing half asleep at the wheel.

A mischievous look crossed Barney's face.

"Build bonfoires undher me chair, will he?" muttered the rogue. "Shure, it would be ther great pity to lave him inj'y himself at my expinse widout toochin' him up a bit fer it, bad cess to his poug nose!"

He saw that both of Pomp's hands clutched the metal wheel, and softly unfastening an electric wire that fed current to the lamps in the sleeping room, he made a hook in the uninsulated end.

Reaching out the wire, he hooked it onto the wheel pivot, and the current flew into the metal.

The coon gave a convulsive start as he got the shock.

Involuntarily his fingers tightened on the wheel.

Then he uttered a wild whoop and flew up into the air.

"Bress de Lawd!" he howled.

He landed on his feet, gasped heavily once or twice, his eyes bulged and every kink in his wool began to unravel.

"Bress de Lawd!" he howled again.

Then his teeth rattled and his face twitched, he galloped up and down, and he threw himself all over.

A roar of laughter escaped Barney.

"Oh, be ther toenail av St. Pattrick," he said, "d'yer moind ther splits an' flip flaps he's adoin'!"

Pomp heard him.

Fastening a baleful glare upon the Irishman, he raved:

"Yo' doze dat! Yo' done dat!"

"I'll take me oath I didn't!" asserted Barney. "It wor the electric spark."

"Tu'n it off, honey, tu'n it off, or I'se a dead coon!"

"Shure I wouldn't lay me finger on it. Is it in ther same soup you're in yez would be after dhraggin' me?"

"I tole yer—wow—I—wow—I—wow!"

And as the current increased Pomp began to throw himself again.

He couldn't let go his grip on the wheel, but as the current flew through him, he kicked higher than his own head and made a terrible effort to pull the wheel to pieces.

Barney took a rest and laughed again.

"Oh, shtop!" he chuckled. "Pomp, ye devil, it's ther death av me you are!"

He fairly doubled up with mirth when in an unguarded moment the nigger's feet shot out like a spile driver and caught him in the face, knocking him heels over head upon the floor.

His backward flight, gripping the electric wire, jerked it away from the steering wheel, relieving Pomp.

As soon as the current stopped the coon was able to let go the wheel, and the next moment he was jumping on Barney with hands and feet and roaring:

"Take dat, yo' good-fo-nuffin I'ish trash! Doan' yo' fool aroun' dis yere bumble bee if yo' d'wanter git stinged."

"Murder in Irish!" howled Barney; "it's ther jim-jams he has. Will some wan loan me an ax till I mssacre ther gorilla?"

Frank was aroused by the fearful racket, and coming out at this juncture, he drove Pomp into the bedroom, replaced the wire, and finally got Barney settled down at the wheel.

On the following afternoon they reached Chicago.

Here Frank alighted on the suburbs, and calling on the postmaster, had a long conference with him.

Jim Fay was then summoned.

"I've just got a report from the West that Dick Ross was last seen in Helena, Montana," said he. "He will very likely be found among the gang operating against the Northern Pacific railroad."

"Then Montana is our point of destination," said Frank, promptly.

"The sooner we start the better."

"I'm ready," replied the inspector.

They parted with the postmaster, and the detective took his grip and went out with Frank.

The officer was amazed at the engine and delighted with its performance when they started it off.

They had a long journey before them, crossing through Iowa and South Dakota ere they ran into the State of Montana, east of the Powder river mountains.

Following the border northward, they reached Fort Buford, on the Northern Pacific road, after crossing the Yellowstone river at its fork from the Missouri.

It was resolved to follow the course of the road through the state, as the mail robbers had been infesting this section for a long time, creating their worst depredations there.

Accordingly, that night, after telegraphing back to Chicago in cipher their intentions, they started off.

Barney and Pomp turned in, leaving Frank and the big man on duty, and as the prairie was fairly smooth, they made good progress toward the distant village of Brocton.

It was a very cloudy night.

Most of the stars were hidden, and the moon showed its silvery disc at infrequent intervals.

Several miles ahead of them the road ran through a woods, and as they drew nearer to it Frank suddenly caught sight of a horseman riding along ahead at an easy pace.

Wondering who he was, the young inventor increased the speed of the Magnet, and rapidly bore down upon him.



Attracted by the glare of the search-light, the rider suddenly glanced back and the inspector viewed him with a glass.

"By thunder!" he ejaculated, suddenly.

"What is it?" queried Frank, in startled tones.

"He is Dick Ross, the very man we are after!"

Frank was amazed.

He viewed the lone rider with a glass.

He was a young man with a slight mustache, dark eyes and hair, and wore a derby and good dark suit.

It was such a bold, reckless face, Frank could never forget it.

"I'll run him down!" he exclaimed.

Adding speed to the Magnet he sent her flying on at a terrific pace, and the horseman took flight.

Observing that he was being pursued he plunged spurs into his horse's flanks and dashed away.

An exciting race between the horse and the engine then began.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### BURIED ALIVE.

Dick Ross was mounted on a magnificent steed, and still following the road, he plunged into the woods in advance of the Magnet.

Here he disappeared from Frank's view.

On rushed the magnetic engine, and in a few moments she entered the gloomy arcade of trees, some of the branches of which overhung the road just above the gun carriage.

The search-light flashing ahead revealed the fugitive.

He was now but a few yards in advance.

Indeed, his capture seemed certain.

The horse was frightened by the Magnet rushing up behind it, and exerted every muscle in a wild effort to get away from it.

Ross glanced back over his shoulder.

He saw what danger he was in.

A look of despair crossed his face.

The gun carriage drew closer.

In a moment more it was almost at his horse's hoofs.

But the rider saw a chance to escape.

He suddenly got upon his feet on the horse's back.

Reaching up his hands, he grasped the branch of a tree.

There he hung.

His steed sped on.

And the Magnet flew past him!

Frank uttered a cry of chagrin when he saw what was done.

He quickly shut off power, and when the machine stopped he turned her around, leaving the riderless horse to go plunging ahead.

Glancing back at the branch to which Ross had been hanging, Frank saw that the man had disappeared.

"By thunder, he has escaped us!" he cried.

"Bad cess ter him, where has he garn?" growled Barney.

"Very likely dropped to the ground, and ran in the woods," said Fay.

"Kain't we chase him in dar?" asked Pomp, in disgust.

"No," Frank replied. "There's no room among the trees to let the gun carriage pass through."

"Faix, I'll folly him afut!" said Barney, energetically.

"And I!" added Frank.

"Count me in!" Fay exclaimed.

They armed themselves with pneumatic pistols.

Directing Pomp to flash the light among the trees they alighted and hastily dashed into the shrubbery.

Here they beat about for some time in quest of the man, and the inspector finally sighted him.

He was some distance away, running fast.

"There he goes!" Fay cried, pointing after the fugitive.

A rush was made after the fugitive by the three, and as Pomp observed what was being done, he concentrated all the light upon that particular spot.

Ross was a swift runner.

He plunged straight ahead until he reached a glen.

As he crossed this opening they observed that he was heading for a pile of rocks upon the opposite side.

There was a dark, cavernous opening at one side, into which he rushed, and vanished from view.

"We've got him cornered now!" cried Frank, joyfully.

"Faith he's loike a rat in a thrap!" Barney commented.

"Are you going to venture in?" queried the inspector.

"Certainly! Come on!"

And so saying Frank rushed into the opening.

The others followed him fearlessly, and they suddenly found themselves within a huge rocky cavern.

Ross had run across the place, and was crouching in a corner watching them by the lurid glow of a fire burning in the middle of the cave.

"Surrender!" Frank shouted at him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" mockingly laughed the man.

"It's on ther other side av yure jowl yez will be chooklin' soon!" the Irishman cried as he leveled a pistol at Ross.

Just then a tremendous metallic clang was heard behind the three, and glancing back, to their dismay they saw that a huge iron door covered the entrance to the cavern.

It had been banged shut and locked by a man.

"Trapped!" cried Ross.

"We are prisoners! I can't open the door!" exclaimed Fay, in alarm.

"Then he has lured us in here on purpose!" said Frank.

At this juncture a number of metallic doors flew open in the walls all around the cavern, revealing a man in each aperture.

There were over a score of the ruffians and each one of them held a Winchester aimed at the three adventurers.

Roughly clad and having hangdog faces that would have convicted them in any honest community, these men were evidently the very gang Frank and his companions had set out to exterminate.

In a word, the cavern was the mail robbers' retreat.

This fact was instantly realized by the three.

Again a sneering, sarcastic laugh escaped Dick Ross.

"Hands up, or you'll get laid out cold!" he exclaimed.

Seeing that their enemies had the drop on them, there was no alternative but for them to obey.

Accordingly they raised their hands over their heads.

Several of the thieves approached, and disarming them at Ross' order, they bound their arms behind their backs.

Once they were secured, Ross drew near and said sarcastically:

"You gave me a blooming chase, you did, but it didn't do you any good! Now I want to know just what you mugs are up to?"

"Oh, we only ran you for fun," the inspector replied.

"Get out! You can't stuff me with any ghost stories after the way you rushed me into this cave with pistols."

He was evidently ignorant of our friends' purpose.

They did not mean to explain matters, but unfortunately the rascal now began to search them.

The first thing he found was the detective's badge, and the next thing was the warrant for his arrest.

It startled the rogue.

He glanced quickly from one to the other, rapidly read the warrant, and holding it aloft, he cried so all his men could hear him:

"This bloot is a fly cop, and this paper is a warrant for my arrest for swiping that registered mail package."

A murmur of surprise ran through the gang.

They now regarded our friends with looks of intense hatred, for each one knew that once he fell into the hands of the three prisoners, his lease of freedom from jail would be short.

An excited discussion of the situation ensued among them.

It was finally ended by Ross saying:

"There ain't any use of gassing about the matter, boys. These duffers are out to put us behind the bars. Are you going to run any chances by letting them get away?"

"No, no, no!" chorused the gang.

"Then for self protection we had better put them out of the way. Are any of you willing to do the work?"

A hush fell on the crowd.

They glanced at each other querulously.

It was clear that none of them were inclined to deliberately kill their prisoners, much as they wished to get rid of them.

Ross glanced keenly from face to face.

He read there their hesitancy.

But he had no intention of abandoning the project.

"Since you have elected me the leader of the gang," he said, in slow, deliberate tones, "I don't intend to see any one of you placed at any disadvantage in the game we are playing. This job has got to be done. As none of you want to nail them on the spot, I'll tell you how it can be done without bloodshed."

"How?" gruffly demanded one of the men.

"You know what a hungry pack the coyotes are. We can let them do the work for us."

"Explain," said the same man.

"We'll bury them in the ground in a standing position and leave their heads out. They will be helpless. The coyotes will finish the job."

This plan suited the crowd, for it would put an end to the hostility of the three friends, and they would not have the remorse that would ensue if they deliberately shot their prisoners down.

Had Frank and his companions done anything to them that would have made them feel vengeful, they would not have had so much compunction about the matter.

Upon seeing that, they all fell in with the scheme. Ross ordered several of them to go out on the prairie beyond the woods, and dig the holes at a stipulated place.

The men complied at once.

Shortly afterward the rascals escorted the prisoners out.

They found that three deep holes had been dug near the margin of the woods, and the prisoners were gagged.

Standing them down in their graves, the thieves filled in the dirt around their bodies, and packed it down.

It held them as rigidly as a vise.

Only their heads remained above ground.

Unable to move or speak, they were now in a desperate situation.

Having completed their murderous work, the thieves went back into the woods and vanished from view.

For a long time the prisoners were left unmolested.

They plainly heard the howling of the coyotes in the distance, but the beasts had not scented them yet.

A low, distant rumble was soon heard.

It came from a distant dark, moving object which was then sweeping directly toward them.

They keenly watched it.

Presently they observed that it was a herd of cattle.

They had been stampeded and were rushing straight toward the spot where Frank and his companions were buried.



Along they came—hundreds of them—bellowing and snorting, and in a short time they reached the three exposed heads.

As the brutes went rushing along, they threatened to trample the heads of the three prisoners into a pulp.

## CHAPTER V.

### POMP'S EXPLOITS.

POMP had seen his companions speeding away in pursuit of the fugitive, and finally lost sight of them.

Judging by the direction in which they had gone, he surmised that they would pass through the woods.

As he could be of no further use to them where he then was, he imagined that it would be an excellent plan to go around the timber and meet them on the other side.

With this purpose in view, he finally pulled the lever to start the Magnet, but to his astonishment the machine failed to move from where she stood.

"Golly!" muttered the coon; "anything de matter wif her?"

He pulled the lever over still further.

The gun carriage remained as immovable as if it were rooted to the spot she then occupied.

Pomp's surprise increased.

It occurred to him that the batteries might have become exhausted, and passing back into the turret, he looked at them.

They were in good order.

So was the machinery.

The coon was greatly puzzled.

"Fo' de lan' sakes!" he muttered. "I 'specs de wheels am cotched."

Determined to see what the cause of the trouble was, he alighted and glanced at the wheels.

To his intense amazement he found that they were bound together by stout ropes.

In this condition they could not, of course, revolve.

"Who done dat?" he gasped.

Then he glanced around suspiciously, and gave a violent start as he observed half a dozen of Dick Ross' men clambering upon the Magnet on the other side.

Here was an answer to the puzzle.

They had evidently fastened the gun carriage.

Every one of them were armed, and bore the unmistakable stamp of ruffians upon their faces.

"Gosh!" muttered Pomp, utterly aghast. "Who am dey?"

He strongly suspected that they were friends of Ross, and slunk back into the woods out of their sight.

Pomp dared not return aboard.

He thought they were enemies and would attack him.

It was clear that he could do nothing against such a big crowd, and with a groan came to the conclusion that they had control of the Magnet.

He saw them enter the two turrets.

Then one of them shouted:

"Not a soul aboard!"

"Then she's ours!"

"Yes, and Ross will lure those three into the cave."

"That will be the end of them for awhile."

"Who are they?"

"I can't imagine."

"They must be enemies."

"Why?"

"Because they chased Ross with guns."

"What's become of the nigger?"

"He must have left."

"Cut the ropes on the wheels."

A man alighted on each side of the engine, armed with knives, and a broad grin overspread the mope's face when he saw them sever the binding lines.

He had left the lever pulled over.

The power was all on.

No sooner were the lines cut when the wheels began to fly around, and the Magnet suddenly rushed away, carrying four of the mail robbers with her.

The two who alighted were left behind.

A wild yell escaped them, and as the engine rushed off, the two men who were left behind rushed after her.

Pomp was alarmed over the loss of the Magnet, but delighted to see the men caught in their own trap.

What the result would be he had not the remotest idea, but he hastened after them.

He soon passed through the woods and heard a tremendous bellowing and pounding of hoofs.

Then he saw the herd of stampeded cattle.

They were surging along the margin of the woods in a vast army, going to the eastward.

Buried in the midst of the herd he caught sight of the Magnet's search-light.

Dashing among the animals, it had so frightened them that the course they were pursuing was instantly changed, the ones in the rear following the leaders.

The two men who had run after the machine had been overtaken by the animals and were knocked down.

They were trampled into unconsciousness and death ensued.

Pausing, the coon gave a cry of alarm, for just then he saw the Magnet plunge into a hollow on one side.

It flung her over upon her side.

She was brought to a sudden pause and the buzz of her whirling wheels ripping up the dirt arose shrilly.

Several of the steers coming along at full speed struck against the engine, and tripped over her.

Had the course of the herd not been deviated, there would soon have been a large number of the beasts piled on top of the carriage.

The yells of the men who were in her when she went over could have been heard a great distance.

One of them had been badly hurt.

Another left the machine and before he fairly realized his danger, he was knocked down by the beasts, and pounded until he lost his senses.

The other two discreetly remained where they were, and as Pomp saw that most of the steers were gone, he made a rush for the gun carriage.

It was his intention to get aboard, and procure a weapon of some kind to defend himself.

The last of the steers had passed by the time the coon reached the overturned machine.

He hastily climbed into the turret and got a brace of pistols.

Peering through the window, he saw the two uninjured men climb out of the wheel room.

No sooner had they alighted when Pomp fired two shots at them through one of the rifle slots.

The wild hope had arisen in his mind that he might regain possession of the Magnet by quick work.

Both men bit the dust, yelling with pain.

"Hurroar!" yelled Pomp. "I see winged 'em! Now fo' de yunders!"

He got out of the turret and rushed up to the wheel room.

One glance inside showed him that one of the men lay senseless inside, while the other, badly wounded, lay groaning upon the ground near by.

"Golly! Got de hull crowd!" delightedly cried the coon.

He procured some lines.

Rushing up to the two men he wounded, he aimed his pistols at them, and roared:

"Say dar!"

"Don't fire!" screamed one of the men.

"Den frow away yo' pistols an' knives."

"Yes! Yes! Don't fire, I say!"

And they both obeyed.

Pomp bound them.

Having thus secured the two, he fastened the others.

The two men who had been overtaken by the steers, while racing after the machine, had been killed.

"The coyotes an' turkey buzzards take car' ob dem," the darky muttered, after an inspection of the bodies.

Then he returned to the engine.

A glance at the magnet showed Pomp plainly that he could not hope to get her upon her wheels unaided.

The prisoners all were so disabled that no use could be made of them, so Pomp began to wonder where his three friends were.

He saw that he was not far from the place toward which he had seen them running after Ross.

"I suspects I done bettah go inter de woods an' see if I kain't fine 'em," he muttered. "Lord amassy, who'd a fink dis cullud genman could catch six men wifout help. Golly! golly! dey ain't no flies on me, fo' shuah!"

And very much pleased over his apprehension of the four men Pomp hurried over toward the woods.

He had not gone far when he was startled by hearing a number of deep, dismal groans.

Casting a frightened glance around and failing to see any one, a superstitious dread filled his mind.

"Ghosteses!" he gasped.

Then he started to run.

The groans came from Frank, Barney and Jim.

As soon as they saw the coon rush off they changed their groaning to strange cries which could only be uttered through their nostrils, as the gags over their mouths precluded the possibility of uttering a word.

Pomp glanced down and dimly saw their three heads flush with the ground, but saw no signs of their bodies.

To hear these apparently trunkless heads giving utterance to those strange, inarticulate cries increased Pomp's terror.

He gave a horrible yell and made a frantic run back for the machine.

Inside he crept, and there he ensconced himself and remained until the next morning, terrified by the awful sight he had witnessed, and never suspecting that he had been looking at the heads of his friends.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE BROKEN RING-BOLT.

WHEN the light of day finally dawned upon the scene, the coon crept out of the overturned machine.

His prisoners were raving and swearing over the position into which they had been placed.

Pomp was very much troubled.

He could not tell what had become of his friends, but hoped to find them somewhere in the woods.



He recalled to mind the fright he got from those three mysterious heads lying on the ground groaning at him, and he fairly shivered with horror over the recollection.

"Spects I bettah git back dar whar Marse Frank an' de res' was," cogitated Pomp. "Mebbe dey's lookin' fo' me."

He started toward the woods again.

Glancing toward the spot where he had seen the mysterious heads, to his alarm, he saw them again.

There they were, three in the row.

Pomp halted and gasped.

Then he dodged into the Magnet again.

As soon as he recovered from the nervous shock, he picked up a telescope, and cautiously pointed it out the window at the heads, for he was afraid to approach them.

Pomp was no coward.

On the contrary, he was as brave a little coon as ever lived, but like all his race, he possessed a deep element of the superstitious in his nature.

Moreover, it must be admitted that the bravest man caught in a situation similar to what Pomp had been would have been very unpleasantly affected.

The telescope showed the faces plainly to the coon, and despite the gags covering a portion of their three faces he recognized them at once.

"Jerusalem de golden!" he roared.

Down dropped the glass with a bang, out of the room he scrambled, and the next moment he rushed for his friends.

It only occupied a few moments for the startled coon to reach them, and he muttered regretfully:

"Oh, what a big fool I is! Why didn' I know dem las' night? My—my! An' I link dey was ghosteses an' leabe dem dar all night! Oh, oh, wasn't dat drefful!"

Reaching them, and seeing the gags stopping their utterance, he realized at once why, instead of speaking, they had made the queer sounds that scared him.

In a moment more he unfastened the gags.

He saw how they were buried now.

"Safe, safe!" cried Frank, the first thing.

"Be heavens, I niver expected that spalpeen av a nagur would know enough ter obligate us this way," said Barney.

"Dig us out, Pomp!" hoarsely implored Jim. "We are chilled to the bone, and feel as if we were fastened in straight jackets."

"How, fo' hebbin sake, yo' git yere?" gasped the coon.

Frank explained in a few words.

Then Pomp told what happened to him.

When he finished, the inventor said:

"We thought we were doomed when the steers were all around our heads. But just then the Magnet rushed among them, and ere they could crush in our skulls they were diverted from their course. The whole lot rushed off in another direction at a safe distance from us."

"Amn't it mighty queer dat de coyotes didn' tackle yo'?"

"No. The stampede of the steers must have driven them far away from here. So Dick Ross' plot to kill us failed. Now bring a shovel from the gun carriage and get us out of here, for we can't stand being cramped this way any longer, old fellow."

Pomp nodded and hastened off.

He soon returned with a spade and dug them out.

It was some time ere they had the use of their limbs, but the coon rubbed them and worked about them until he finally got their blood properly circulating again.

When they were able to walk, they returned to the Magnet, and having seen the four prisoners, they procured a tackle, and set to work at raising the gun carriage.

By their united efforts they got her on her wheels again.

"She's badly pounded, but it will be easy to mend her," said Frank, after he had made a close examination of her.

They lost no time at putting her in running order.

After a few hours she was ready.

The prisoners were confined in the turret.

Frank intended to leave them at the first town they came to.

"Which way now?" asked the inspector.

"I'm going to bombard the woods," Frank replied.

"Wha' fo'?" queried Pomp.

"To drive out the rascals."

"If they're there," added Barney.

They drove the Magnet to a favorable position.

Her guns were then turned toward the place where Frank supposed the den among the rocks was.

He then opened fire upon the woods, assisted by his companions, and shot after shot rang out.

Every time the massive shells burst among the trees the shrubbery was blown high in the air.

Frightful havoc was made among the woods, and when they finally desisted Frank and his friend armed themselves, and started off afoot to investigate.

As they expected the cavern was rent to pieces.

Great masses of trees were torn asunder as if they were whisks of straw, and vast holes and trenches were ripped into the ground.

"Not a sign of them here," commented Frank, finally.

"Shure yez wouldn't be after shtayin' yerself wld thim koin'd av foircrackers apoppin' all around ye," laughed Barney. "But it's no use they'll have fer this place agin."

"Where are we to look for them now?" blankly asked Jim.

"They must have taken to the road," replied Frank. "Had they

come out on this side of the woods we would have seen them. As they would not be likely to go back the way we saw Ross come from, we would be most apt to find them going to the westward, I think."

"Then it's in that direction we'll go, bedad."

They returned to the gun carriage.

Pomp prepared breakfast for them, and at its conclusion they started off toward Glasgow.

It was a small place.

On the way there Frank went into the turret.

"Which one of you fellows wishes to get the lightest sentence?" he asked the prisoners.

There was a momentary pause.

One of the most cowardly of the four then spoke:

"If we're bound to go up," said he, "I'm the one."

"Then I'll have you treated with clemency if you will tell me where the gang is going from their den in the woods."

The fellow hesitated.

Glancing at his friends, he saw them scowling at him.

"Don't betray the gang!" hissed one.

"If you do, it will cost you your life!" said the second.

"Shut up, Bill; do you want to put your pals in jail?" said the other.

Frank watched the man keenly.

He was a good reader of human character.

In this man he saw a most arrant sneak and coward.

The fellow seemed to be scared at his friends' warning words.

"I guess I'd better keep still," he muttered.

"Very well," said Frank, shrugging his shoulders carelessly, "so much the worse for you. Had you spoken, I could have taken you as State's evidence, and had your sentence shortened by at least a year."

He made a pretense of going out.

An anxious look swept over the man's face, and he burst into a cold sweat as he gasped:

"Hold on there, partner."

"What do you want?" demanded Frank.

"I'll tell you, if you'll stand by me."

"You have my word for it."

The three others began to swear at the traitor.

He was too anxious to ease his own condition to pay much attention to them now, however, so he said:

"I don't care what you fellows say. We are all in the same boat."

Every man for himself. I'm going to blow."

"Well?" asked Frank.

"To-night they have got a job on hand to stop the 9:30 mail on the Northern Pacific, and get the registered package pouches."

"Whereabouts are they going to operate?"

"Between Wayne and Ashfield."

"In any particular place?"

"Yes, in the tunnel."

"Good! I'll look out for you now."

Frank had gained some very valuable information and he left the prisoners, resolved to be on hand in time to baffle the mail robbers.

Upon reaching Glasgow, he put the prisoners in the hands of the authorities there, and telegraphed to Helena for an officer to come and get them.

The Magnet was then steered for Ashfield.

They had a long journey before them, and were confident of being able to thwart the thieves.

Unfortunately for their plans, however, a most serious accident occurred to the gun carriage, that threatened to delay them so that they could not get to the tunnel in time.

The kingbolt suddenly snapped in two, the front steering wheels flew from under the Magnet, and the forward part of the engine fell down, bringing her to a pause.

## CHAPTER VII.

### DERAILED IN THE TUNNEL.

It was late in the afternoon when the king bolt broke, and the Magnet was traversing a stretch of ground near the railroad miles from civilization.

When the forward part of the machine went down every one was flung to the floor, and the steering wheels rolled ahead.

Frank instantly stopped the machinery.

"By heavens this is bad!" he cried. "I haven't got another king bolt on the gun carriage. One will have to be made. But it will occupy time to do it, and as we are a long way from the tunnel between Wayne and Ashfield where the mail robbers intend to hold up the train we may not get there by 9:30 to baffle them."

Every one was filled with dismay.

One of the four men whom they had left locked up in Glasgow had clearly explained what the thieves meant to do that night, but it seemed that they could not avail themselves of the information now.

Every one alighted and examined the machine.

A jack was taken from the store room in the turret and they raised the front of the carriage.

Having rolled the front wheels over to the body of the vehicle they took out the pieces of the broken bolt.

A steel rod of the required size was then cut and shaped, and after a most tedious delay and considerable hard work, they finally extemporized a new bolt.

Night had fallen upon the scene by the time the axle was again fastened to the body of the vehicle.



Pomp prepared supper.

When it was finished they started off.

"She steers very stiffly," Frank commented to the Irishman as they rolled along. "But I hope that constant use will cause the front wheels to work more freely."

"Arrah, but it's hard look we do be havin', me bye," said the Celt, regretfully. "Shure an' I hope we'll raich the tooonnel in toime."

"If we don't, I've got a plan to circumvent the rascals yet."

"An' what may that be?"

"To stop at Ashfield, and prevent the train going on."

"Can't we be ather doin' that onyhow?"

"We could, but we need the train to decoy them from cover."

"Suppose they gets ther besht av us?"

"I'll prepare for that contingency."

"How?" asked Barney, curiously.

"You'll see when we reach the depot."

The gun carriage made good headway.

In due time she reached Ashfield, when Frank observed the very train they were after just leaving the place.

"There she goes, now!" he cried, in anxious tones.

"Chase her, or be heavens we can do nuthin'!"

Away flew the Magnet in pursuit of the train, and after a swift dash, they overtook it.

"Hey!" shouted Frank at the engineer as they ran up to the cab.

"Hello—what in thunder is that machine?"

"Stop the train quick, or you are all dead men!"

There was something in the inventor's tones that scared the man, and he rapidly brought the train to a halt.

Leaning out the window of the caboose as the Magnet paused beside the engine, he asked anxiously:

"What's the trouble, my friend?"

"There's a plan afoot to hold up the train in the tunnel."

"Is that so? Who's going to do it?"

"A gang of mail thieves."

"How do yon know?"

Frank rapidly detailed the news.

One of the conductors had alighted.

Joining the engineer, he heard Frank's story.

A feeling of alarm took possession of them.

"What shall we do?" asked the conductor.

"Run back to Ashfield," Frank replied.

"Give up our run?"

"No; but procure all the armed men you can get, and when the thieves tackle the train give them a red hot reception. We will be on hand to assist you with our guns."

This scheme was eagerly assented to.

Reversing the engine, the train was pushed back to the village.

Here recruiting parties went out, and in half an hour a dozen armed men were procured near the depot.

Nothing was said to the passengers about the matter as it was not deemed advisable to prematurely frighten them.

Having put the armed men in the baggage car with the railway mail agent, the train started off again.

Frank allowed it to get half a mile ahead before he started the gun carriage along after it.

"We can come up while the villains are attacking the train and catch them in the rear," said the inventor. "They will thus be caught between two fires."

"Shure it's the brain av ageneral yez has entoirely," said Barney, admiringly. "We may be after scoopin' in ther hull kit an' crew av thim with wan scrimmage."

"If we do that will end our work."

"May we have ther look ter do it, then?"

At this moment Frank descried the tunnel ahead, and the train rushed into it.

Instead of any one appearing to stop the cars there came a terrible crash, for one of the rails had been torn up and the locomotive rushed off the track ere the engineer could stop it.

Had it not been for the side wall of the tunnel the cars might have gone over.

The engineer scarcely had time to avert the catastrophe, for there was a bend in the tunnel and the cars were almost upon the derailed section before he saw it.

A panic ensued between the passengers who shouted and screamed under the impression that the train was wrecked.

Even the train hands were very much startled.

In the midst of the confusion Dick Ross and his followers came swarming into the tunnel, and menaced everyone who alighted with the rifles they carried.

"Open the door and fire upon them!" yelled the conductor to the men in the baggage car.

Obediently the door was opened.

Instead of a deadly fusillade pouring from the car as all the train hands expected seven of the men inside, including the express messenger and the railway postal clerk, laid upon the floor under the influence of chloroform.

The rest of the men had done it during the run from Ashfield, for they were part of Ross's gang who had been detailed to board the cars there, and aid the thieves when the tunnel was reached.

Instead of recruiting defenders, the train hands had picked up seven of the mail thieves who were only too anxious to get aboard the cars to carry out the scheme they had in view.

The rascals had secured possession of the mail pouches and flung them out to their companions.

Frank's gun carriage had reached the tunnel, but it could not get through as the derailed train was across the place and blocked it up.

The young inventor had scarcely reached the tunnel when one of the brakemen came rushing back and seeing the Magnet, he shouted: "They've got the mail after all."

"What's the matter with the men in the baggage car?" cried Frank.

"Half of them belonged to the thieves' gang."

"What!" gasped Frank, very much astounded.

"They drugged the rest. We've been duped!"

"Heavens, what a misfortune!"

"And now they're all speeding away on the other side of the tunnel, with the mail bags!" cried the brakeman.

"How am I to get through after them?"

"I don't know as you can do it, sir."

"Is there a way around the tunnel?"

"You can't go up the hill on one side with that machine, as it's all rocks around here. But you can go down into the valley and make a wide detour perhaps."

"All right; I'll try that plan."

Frank backed the Magnet away from the tunnel, and running her back a short distance he soon found a place where he could get down the slope.

On the other hand there was a steep acclivity.

The gun carriage ran down the hill and made a wide circuit before she could get back to the track again.

By that time all the thieves had disappeared.

The young inventor deflected the search-light.

He saw a plain trail of many horses' hoofs imprinted upon the ground leading to the westward.

"There's a clew to follow," said he, pointing at it. "Pomp, you have a sharp pair of eyes. Go out on the front platform and watch the tracks. If I make any error in following the trail you can set me aright."

"Yassah," replied the coon.

He seated himself on the platform over the cowcatcher, and Frank added speed to the wheels.

The trail led them directly to Wayne.

It was a small settlement, and was a favorite resort of miners, prospectors, cowboys and people of a similar character.

That Dick Ross's gang had stopped here was very evident, and as the lights of the place loomed up ahead, our friends began to make preparations for trouble.

Presently the magnetic machine reached the village, and came to a pause near the outskirts.

"I'm going into the town to look for the thieves," said Frank.

"Come on, Jim, and see if we can't find out what has become of those ruffians."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### SAVING THE MAIL BAGS.

THERE were a number of saloons and gambling dens in the village, and Frank and the inspector began to search them.

None but cowboys and miners were found in the first places they visited, but they finally started for a larger saloon, to which there was attached a big stable.

"As they rode here, they would be likely to have put their horses out of sight if they are stopping in this place," said Frank. "Let us first examine the stable."

The inspector nodded assent.

Passing around to the back of the saloon, they glanced in the windows, and saw that the room was crowded with men who were smoking, drinking, talking, laughing and shouting.

The stable stood at some distance from the rear of the house, and as they drew near it, they heard the stamping of horses' hoofs coming from within.

Frank opened the door and looked in.

A lantern dimly illuminated the interior.

By its light they observed a large number of horses hitched along the wall with bridles and saddles on.

They passed inside.

Scarcely had the door closed after them when a man sprang from among the horses and confronted them.

Frank instantly recognized him as one of Ross' men.

At the same juncture Jim's keen eyes noted the fact that there were a number of mail pouches fastened to the backs of four of the horses.

"Look out!" cautioned the inventor.

"He is going to fire," replied the inspector.

The big detective clutched a pistol in his hand, but ere he could use it the guard fired at him.

Only a quick movement to one side, which Jim made at that moment, saved his life.

The ball flew past his head and crashed harmlessly through the door in back.

"Confound him!" cried Frank. "He will alarm the rest."

"Missed me, by ginger!" the detective muttered, grimly.

He fired back at the man as he spoke.

The bullet struck the guard's legs and he uttered a yell and fell writhing to the floor.

Frank bounded forward and disarmed him.

"Open the door, Jim!" he cried.

"All right. What are you going to do?"

"Drive away the animals with the mail bags."



"There are four of them."  
 "Mount one and lead the other."  
 "Good! There goes the door open!"  
 They rapidly began to unfasten the animals.  
 While they were so engaged the man on the floor began to scream at the top of his voice!  
 "Hey, Ross! Hey, Ross! This way—quick!"  
 "The fool will betray us!" exclaimed Frank.  
 "We should have gagged him."  
 "It is too late now. Hurry up!"  
 "I'm ready."

They each sprang astride of a horse, and leading the other animals rode from the stable.

When they arrived outside, they saw a number of men come rushing from the saloon.

They were the mail robbers.

Recognizing our friends, they saw what was transpiring, and drawing their revolvers they began to blaze away at the two in an effort to stop them.

For the space of a few moments a veritable hail of screaming bullets flew around the two.

They received several trifling wounds, but seemed to bear charmed lives, as they were not killed.

At the first opportunity they returned the fire and kept it up, several of the gang falling wounded.

As their horses were carrying them ahead all the time, they soon opened up a wide gap between themselves and their enemies.

An unlucky shot struck Frank's horse, and it fell.

He landed upon his feet, and tearing the mail bag from the animal's back, he slung it over the other beast.

Getting up behind it, he rode after Jim.

They got around the house.

That stopped the firing for awhile.

But just then several attaches of the saloon ran out, and grasping the bridle of the inspector's horse, one cried angrily as he aimed a pistol at the detective.

"Hold on there!"

"Let go!" roared Jim.

"No horse stealing allowed here."

"We are officers of the law."

"Show us your badge!"

"It was stolen from me with a warrant I had for the arrest of Dick Ross, whose gang you are now harboring."

"That don't wash!"

"Look at these stolen mail bags—"

"Don't waste time parleying!" cried Frank. "You can't convince him—he's too thick. Ride him down!"

"Stand aside, or we'll fire!"

The horses were urged and sprang ahead, causing the men to scatter right and left.

None of them dared to fire at Frank and the officer, for what Jim had said made them think that after all they had told the truth about the matter.

Just then some of the thieves came running around the house, and the saloon attaches shouted at them.

Not another shot was fired.

Indeed, the rascals observed that the place was going to get too hot to hold them soon.

They therefore got out their horses and rode away.

"Victory!" cried Frank as they dashed up to where the gun carriage stood. "We've saved the mail."

They flung the pouches into the turret, drove the horses off, and passed into the wheel room.

While the inspector was giving Barney and Pomp an account of what had happened, Frank drove the vehicle into the village, arousing everybody's amazement at her.

"What are you going to do?" asked Jim.

"Tackle the gang," replied Frank. "Get ready for work."

The Magnet rushed up to the saloon where the thieves had been, but by this time they all were gone.

Frank shouted to one of the men who tried to stop the horses:

"Whereabouts did they go to?"

"I don't know, but they headed for the southward," replied the man.

"That would take them to the river," muttered the inventor.

He promptly sent the Magnet after them.

After a short search they found the trail and followed it.

Upon reaching the river all trace of the fugitives was lost.

They spent the whole night searching for them, but failing to do so, they returned to the railroad.

Here a west-bound train was stopped, and the recovered mail bags were put in care of the express messenger for delivery at their destination.

Our friends then gained some much needed rest.

Several days were spent hunting for the thieves.

It seemed to be utterly impossible to find them, for upon reaching the river, every trace vanished.

Frank resolved to keep on going to the west, as he considered it very improbable that Ross would go east again.

It was late in the afternoon when he started, and keeping along the course of the river, she soon reached a wild picturesque section filled with trees, shrubbery and rocks.

A short time after entering this region, he heard Barney say:

"Isn't that ther loikes av a house beyant, Pomp?"

"Specs it am, honey," replied the coon, who stood with the Celt on the rear platform on watch.

"What are you alluding to?" questioned Frank through the half open rear door. "I don't see anything of a house."

"Faix its only a shanty amooing thim bushes to the right."

"Ah—yes. Now I see it? And there's smoke coming out of the chimney. The place must be inhabited. Shall we see who lives there? We might gain some information."

"I go ober dar fo' yo' Marse Frank."

"All right. Take Barney along."

The young inventor stopped the Magnet, and Barney and Pomp alighted, and approached the hut.

It faced the river, but stood far back from the bank among some bushes that almost concealed it.

Therefore, when the coon and the Celt approached it they drew near the rear of the little building.

Neither of them made any noise, and having arrived close to the hovel, they were suddenly brought to a pause by hearing voices coming from inside.

The voices were low, and evidently those of two men.

It was almost impossible to distinguish a word that was said from where they were, so they quietly crept around to the side of the building.

Here there was a window.

It stood wide open.

The voices now sounded plainer.

One of them was that of a stranger.

The other proved to be that of Dick Ross.

Barney was startled when he heard it.

Raising his finger warning Pomp to remain quiet, he intently listened to what was being said inside.

The very first words uttered startled the Irishman beyond all measures, and sent the blood curdling like wildfire through his veins.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A RASCALLY SCHEME.

"I'll have that mail bag, or I'll have the man's life!"

Such was the expression uttered by Dick Ross, in low, sinister tones, and the two listeners heard him bang his fist heavily upon a table to emphasize what he said.

"Have you formed any plan whereby you can get it?" the other man asked, after a pause.

"Let me hear all about it again, and then I can come to some definite conclusion," replied Ross.

"Certainly. I am, as I told you, a traveling salesman for the richest firm of jewelers in Helena. My plan was to send them an order for \$25,000 worth of diamond jewelry, to be sent to me at Fort Benton, where I ostensibly have a customer for the stuff. Well, sir, I will order it sent in a registered mail package. I will tell them to mail it at four o'clock on Saturday, so that it will reach me by seven or eight. But one train that carries mail will leave Helena that night at five o'clock. That is the train the jewelry will be on."

"Yes, yes," eagerly assented the mail robber.

"The mail pouches will go in care of one man—the express messenger—who will lock himself in the mail room on the baggage car. Your work will simply amount to getting that mail bag between Helena and Fort Benton. I will meet you on the following day at the Shaakin Creek stock range, and you can pay me cash for my share."

"One thousand dollars you say?"

"Yes, that's cheap enough, isn't it?"

"Reasonable, as you run no risk."

"No, it won't be any risk for me, for the firm will hear that the goods have been intercepted before they reach me. That will clear me of course."

"And your mythical customer?"

"Oh, I can say he was a transient who left for parts unknown as long as the goods did not reach him."

"How did you happen to know I'd go into this snap?"

"I gamble some, and met one of your men in a faro-room a few days ago. He was an old schoolmate of mine. Seeing me lose all my money and some of my firm's, he suggested the plan, and I was only too eager to grasp it to set myself straight again. It was the fellow who introduced me to you in Chinook. Then you arranged to meet me here to talk it over with you, as you know, and there you have the idea again."

"And as I said before," said Ross, "I'll have the mail bag containing that jewelry, or I'll have the express messenger's life."

"I wouldn't do anything rash."

Ross laughed sarcastically.

His whole life now was made up of rash deeds.

"You don't know me, cully," he exclaimed, lapsing into his slangy way of talking. "Lately I've got so that I don't care a curse what happens, for the greater the risk a fellow runs, the better his chances of success are."

"Now how can you get the mail bag?"

"I've got a scheme. You leave it all to me. Go back to Chinook and peacefully await developments. I'll meet you at noon on Sunday at the range in the stockade by the creek."

"Very well. You will treat me fair?"

"Of course. I think \$1,000 for \$25,000 is quite cheap."

They stopped talking.

Barney and Pomp had expressions of the most intense wonder upon their faces, and glanced mutely at each other.



"Be ther poker an' Moses, this is a chait!" muttered the Celt.  
 "De wustest willainy dat dis coon ebber hear tell ob."  
 "D'ye moind ther cuteness av ther game."  
 "Golly, how dat feller roast his boss."  
 "Pomp, ye divil, it's on'y two av thim in ther hoot."  
 "Dat's all, Barney."  
 "An' it's itchin' I am ter git ther grip av me fisht on Ross."  
 "Gwine ter tackle him, honey?"  
 "Be heavens, I am!"  
 "Come on, den, chile, an' I'se gwine ter help yo'!"

They drew their pistols, saw that they were in readiness for action, and crept over to the door.

Casting a searching glance around, and seeing no one near, they suddenly bounded to their feet and rushed into the gloomy little hut. Coming from the bright light outside into the gloom of the hut, they could not see distinctly at first.

"Surrender, or you're dead min!" roared Barney.

"Han's up, dar!" echoed Pomp, dramatically.

No reply was vouchsafed.

They became accustomed to the gloom.

Peering around, they failed to see any one.

"They're garn, begorra!"

"Oh, Lor'!" groaned Pomp, in disgust.

Both men had silently departed.

It only required a moment to lose themselves to view among the dense bushes abounding upon all sides.

Barney and Pomp were very much chagrined.

"Arrah, it's a dirty thrick they've played us!" groaned the Irishman. "Why didn't thim spalpeens shlay here and take a dacent bullet or two loike gintlemin?"

"Yo' spec dey knowed dat we was yere, Barney?"

"Faith, it lucks as if they wor afeerd an' roon."

"Wha' we'se gwine ter do, honey?"

"Luck fer 'em, av coorse."

They hastened out and beat about the bushes for some time, but failed to locate their men.

Ross and the rascally salesman had vanished as quickly and suddenly as if the ground had swallowed them up.

Finally they abandoned the hunt.

"It's av no use, Pomp. We can't foind thim," said Barney.

"Den les go back ter de Magnet an' tole Marse Frank what dem scallawags ses," replied the coon.

Barney assented and they returned to the gun carriage.

"Well, boys, what luck?" the inventor sung out.

"Beggorra, we got it in ther neck!" complained the Celt.

"Anything gone wrong?"

"Shure it's a funeral we missed."

"A funeral? Whose?"

"Dick Ross."

"What? Did you meet him?"

"I wish we did," growled Barney.

Thereupon he detailed what happened.

Frank and Jim were as much startled as Barney and Pomp had been, and when the story was finished, Frank cried:

"By thunder! this is a villainous trick! We must try to find a means of spoiling their plan."

"I don't see how we are going to do it," said Jim.

"Why, they gave out enough information to give us a good many advantages," answered Frank. "Of course we cannot tell who the jewelers are whom they intend to rob, but we know what train they intend to rob, and will know where to find the salesman on Sunday."

"Then what do you propose doing?"

"Why, as we can't find either of the men now, we had better run down to Helena and warn the express messenger of the train in question to be upon his guard. We can then follow the cars as we have done before, and guard them for Fort Benton."

"Very well; that seems to be the only way to do."

A run was then made to Helena.

They cut down between the Bear Paw Mountains and the Three Buttes to make a shorter road by the gold mines.

The plains were treeless and covered with bunch grass, the mountain valleys were clothed with artemisia, while the slopes were covered with forests of aspen, cottonwood, cedars and pines, among which bears, lynx and wildcat roamed.

Moose and Rocky Mountain goat were seen in the uplands, the former in the cool, marshy valleys, and the latter upon the more rugged and inaccessible elevations.

Great herds of bison ranged the plains, and troops of the black-tailed and mule deer, antelopes and elks were seen grazing in various places, or flying from the gun carriage.

When the engine had reached the towering rocks in the vicinage of the Great Falls of the Missouri, near Fort Benton, a large body of horsemen were seen approaching.

Upon arriving nearer, Frank observed that they were a band of Sioux Indians from one of the reservations.

They were being hotly pursued by a larger party of hostile Crows, whom they had attacked while in camp.

The reservations of these, the Blackfeet, Gros Ventre, Assiniboine and Pend d' Oreille Indians cover more than one third of the territory.

For a moment Frank imagined the two bands of redskins were intent upon attacking the gun carriage.

He dashed into the turret and fired a shot at them.

Several of the Indians were wounded, and the rest halted.

Away flew a second shot at the pursuers, and several of the red-men went down.

The rest scattered in all directions.

By common consent hostilities between the two parties suddenly ceased, and they combined forces to attack the inmates of the Magnet.

They had become so scattered that Frank could not get another shot at them with his guns.

His error was destined to cause them considerable trouble.

"Arm yourselves, boys!" he shouted to his friends.

"Come in here!" cried Jim, who held the wheel. "They are making a rush from the front."

Frank started to do so, and was crossing the platform when the carriage jolted over a hillock; he lost his balance and fell to the ground.

On rushed the Magnet, leaving Frank behind.

## CHAPTER X.

### FIGHTING THE INDIANS.

"HELP! Help! Help!" shouted Frank.

He scrambled to his feet, and ran after the Magnet at the top of his speed, for several of the Sioux came dashing toward him on their ponies as soon as he fell.

They gave utterance to the most blood-curdling war-whoops, and sent a volley of poisoned arrows flying after him.

It was impossible to take accurate aim, so fast were they plunging ahead, but the barbed shafts whistled dangerously close around the head of the young inventor.

He ran as he had never run before.

But the swift ponies rapidly overtook him.

The paint streaked warriors were brandishing their lances and tomahawks menacingly, their feathered head gear waved in the wind, and they rode as if part of their steeds.

It was a wild race.

Jim heard Frank's shouts.

He glanced back and saw what had happened.

Around he spun the steering wheel, the Magnet made a curve, and back she started toward Frank.

It was evident that the Indians would reach the inventor before the gun carriage could.

"Barney! Pomp!" yelled the inspector.

"Hurroo fer Ireland!" shouted the Celt.

"Fire upon them—quick, fer Frank is unarmed!"

"Golly! dar's gwine fo' ter be some dead Injuns yere soon."

And two shots were discharged.

Bang! Bang! they roared as they each hit a warrior.

The Irishman and the coon were dead shots, and they followed the first round with a second.

Just then the savages were almost upon Frank, but two more of them bit the dust.

But one remained.

Undaunted by the fate of his companions he resolutely kept on after Frank, and raised his tomahawk to deal the inventor a fatal blow as the pony dashed up to him.

Frank saw his danger.

He sprang aside to the left.

The steed rushed by him.

He grasped its bridle as it was passing.

Around it swerved, and running a few steps with it the daring fellow gave an agile leap, and landed on the beast in front of the astonished Indian.

The next moment he grappled the savage.

For a moment they fiercely struggled, the Sioux striving to deal the gallant fellow a blow with his hatchet, and Frank, restraining his arm with one hand, and gripping the red man's throat with the other.

The pony plunged ahead a few yards, and stumbling under its heavy load, it went down on its knees.

Frank and the Indian were tossed over its head.

They landed with a thud, the inventor underneath and a fierce yell of exultation escaped the brave.

He tore his arm free.

The tomahawk was raised.

But before he could kill Frank the inspector fired a pistol shot that struck the redskin plumb in the heart.

A look of intense agony convulsed his painted face.

He straightened up, his black, sparkling eyes distended and the next moment he pitched over—dead.

Frank gave a deep sigh.

Scrambling to his feet he saw the magnetic gun carriage come rushing up to where he stood.

In a moment more he was upon her.

He lost no time in getting inside the vehicle and then saw that the whole band of Indians were coming thundering after the Magnet.

Her flight deceived them into the belief that she was flying from them from fear.

"Close the window shutters!" cried Frank, breathlessly.

"I can't. They're stuck," replied the inspector.

"That's bad. We will be exposed."

"Here's a rifle. Now look out."

The whole horde of redskins were closing in on them from all sides, and while Barney and Pomp, in the turret, began to fire, Frank and Jim did the same through the windows.

Several of the savages were struck.



## CHAPTER XI.

## A TERRIBLE CONFLICT.

They raised a tremendous din with their yells.

The remaining warriors hurled their lances, and those who had revolvers began to use them.

A tremendous fusillade on both sides followed.

Every shot that struck the Magnet was turned aside, as it was incapable of piercing the strong metal plates, but two of the lances flew in through the wheel-room windows.

One of them passed between Frank and Jim, and went out the side window, while the other pinned the sleeve of the inventor's jacket to the wooden switchboard.

"Release me, Jim."

"Did it stick you?"

"No; just grazed my arm."

"You are mighty lucky."

The inspector cut him free.

Then they used their rifles again.

Several times Frank essayed to close the blinds.

It was impossible, however, for they had become jammed in their grooves and would not budge an inch.

It left the inventor and his companion in a perilous position, upon observing which Frank exclaimed:

"We'll go under yet if we remain here."

"Tell me what to do."

"Put on speed and get out of the circle of savages."

The detective pulled the magnet lever and the wheels flew around rapidly, carrying them toward the nearest redskins.

One of them was unlucky enough to get directly in the way, and the cowcatcher slammed against his pony's legs.

The poor brute was knocked spinning.

A howl of alarm burst from the rider as he was sent flying through the air and landed in a clump of cactus.

On rushed the machine furiously.

She was soon beyond the lines of the savages.

"Barney!" called Frank. "Operate those guns against them."

"Erin-go-bragh!" roared the Irishman. "Watch me make shpit balls av ther hull gang!"

Frank ran back to aid him.

They got the guns going and several shots were fired, creating terrible destruction among the red men.

That brought them to a halt.

Jim stopped the Magnet.

By dint of hard pounding at the shutters he finally slid them over the windows, and then started the gun carriage toward the Indians, who thereupon fled.

Away they dashed at breakneck speed, leaving their wounded companions lying upon the ground.

After them rattled the magnetic machine, and they headed for the rocks along the river, followed by several shots from the air rifles in the hands of our friends.

In the course of a few minutes, with several of their number severely wounded, they reached the rocks and quickly vanished from view.

Jim changed the course of the Magnet.

She could not pursue the redmen among the rocks.

Frank returned to the wheelroom.

"The fight is ours!" he exclaimed.

"Shall I try to drive them out of there?" asked Jim.

"No; let them remain. We will go on. I would not have lifted a finger against them if I did not think they were going to attack us first."

Jim held the machine on her course, and they soon left the redskins miles behind them, and then attended to their injuries.

On the following day they reached the vicinage of Helena, and leaving the gun carriage in a secure retreat, Frank made his way to the railroad depot.

Here he had a long conversation with the superintendent of the road, telling him all about the plot Ross had formed with the traveling salesman.

It was decided to arm all the train employees and have the Magnet follow the train.

The express messenger was apprised of what to expect, and as it was pretty near time to haul out the train, nothing could be done with the post officials about keeping back the package addressed to the treacherous salesman.

If Frank had more time he might have had that particular package withheld.

But little danger was anticipated now, however, as all the train employees knew what to expect.

Frank returned aboard of the Magnet.

Having told his companions what he had done, they started the Magnet along the railroad track.

She waited until the marked train came along, and then began to follow it to Fort Benton.

Every one was on the alert now, for they did not know what Ross planned to do, and could only hope to catch him in the act of executing his trick.

The night was clear and moonlit, and they soon left the city out of sight behind, and ran along through the diversified scenery of the country going toward Benton.

Frank remained on duty at the wheel.

All his companions were armed and posted in various positions about the vehicle in readiness for action at a moment's notice.

The train was made up of a locomotive, three passenger coaches, and one baggage car, which trailed along at the end.

As the train ran into a deep ravine down a steep grade, a man suddenly appeared coming out the rear door of the last coach.

He crossed to the baggage car.

Seeing no one watching, he uncoupled it from the coach.

Then he ran up the ladder to the roof and put on the brake.

As the baggage car began to slacken speed, the rest of the train rushed ahead, leaving it far behind.

Finally the baggage car paused.

The locomotive pulled the rest of the cars out of sight around a bend in the ravine.

Several men burst from the bushes bordering the track.

They were some distance away, but they ran for the uncoupled car, and in a few moments reached it.

Every one of them belonged to Ross's gang.

He was the man who had gone out of Helena on the train as a passenger, with the intention of severing the baggage car from the rest of the train.

His men had made a rendezvous of this place, and had been awaiting the approach of the train.

Not a word was uttered.

They all had been instructed how to act.

When Ross alighted from the car, they quietly went up the track and placed some sticks of dynamite on the rails.

Ross loosened the brake.

He and his companions fled.

Carried along down the incline, the baggage car rolled ahead and reached the dynamite.

Boom! roared the explosion as the heavy wheels crushed it.

One side of the car was blown to pieces, and the rest of it was hurled from the track a complete wreck.

Up to it rushed the mail-robbers.

A hasty search was made among the debris.

Although the car contained the usual kind of baggage, there were no signs of the express messenger.

Nor was there a mail bag in it.

Frank had advised the express messenger to secrete the mail bags under the seats in the passenger coaches and remain with them.

He had done so.

As a result the thieves were foiled.

While they were searching the wreck the Magnet came along.

Ross was furious.

He saw that there was no mail in the car.

"Blast them!" he roared; "they carried no pouches."

"Mebbe ther salesman was foolin' ye," suggested one of the men.

"No, I think not. I knew that this was a mail train."

"But the ain't no bags in it."

"There must have been a mistake somewhere."

"Sure enough, an' thar's wot caused it, sir."

The man pointed at the approaching gun carriage.

It instantly flashed across Ross's mind that Frank was in some way responsible for his disappointment.

Filled with fury, he shouted to his men to retreat upon the bluffs and bombard the magnetic vehicle with dynamite.

They hastened away obediently.

By the time they were out of sight the Magnet reached the wreck.

Frank saw what had happened, and a grim smile crossed his face as he pointed at the ruined car.

"See what they've done," he commented.

"Just wha' yo' spected, ain't it?" queried Pomp.

"Yes. According to all appearances I've duped them."

"Bedad, it's mad they must be," chuckled Barney.

"They must have left in a great hurry," Jim commented, as he glanced around. "Probably they saw us coming."

"In that case they must have scaled the bluffs. As soon as I heard those reports I knew that they were busy blowing up the car."

These words had scarcely left his lips, when down from the towering rocks a missile came hurtling.

It was a small can of dynamite.

Striking the ground beside the Magnet it burst with a roar like thunder, and the machine was lifted from the earth with the upheaval of dirt that followed, and blown away.

Landing a dozen yards from where she had been standing, with her driving-wheels badly damaged and her inmates very much startled, she fell over completely crippled.

"Dynamite!" gasped Frank, in astonishment.

Down came another can.

It struck a few yards in front of the Magnet.

An appalling roar followed.

Up flew a mass of dirt, gravel and broken rock.

It poured all over the carriage, striking the inmates and stung, bruised, and wounded them.

A third can descended.

It landed fifty feet behind the engine.

The report was deafening, and the ground shook.

By this time Frank recovered his faculties.

Realizing that the next shot might strike the Magnet and blow them all to pieces, he shouted:

"They're up on the rocks! Fire at them!"



Out he rushed, armed with a brace of pistols, and followed by his comrades.

They began to fire up at the villains whom they saw swarming on the bluffs, and dropped several of them.

The rest recoiled.

But, although driven back from the edge of the cliff, they did not cease hurling the dynamite cans.

Several more of them came flying down into the ravine, and burst in dangerous proximity to the Magnet.

As the robbers could not locate the machine, they had to fling them hap-hazard.

"Follow them!" cried Frank desperately. "If we let them keep on they are bound to hit her eventually."

And up on the rocks he dashed.

His friends followed.

Reaching the top after a rough climb, they saw the thieves and poured a deadly fire among their ranks.

By this time half a dozen of them were wounded and lying upon the ground groaning.

Observing that they were pursued, the villains hurled their dynamite cans toward that part of the shrubbery from whence the shots came.

Had Frank and his chums not left the place where they had been crouching before the deadly missiles came, they would have been blown to atoms.

They had reached a number of scattered rocks, however, and crouched down behind them.

From here they could fire in more safety.

The dynamite cans burst among the shrubbery with terrible detonations, blowing up everything near them.

There was something awe inspiring about the explosive bullets hurled by the pneumatic rifles.

They struck horror to the very souls of the mail thieves, and unable to withstand the fusillade, they fled for their horses, which were tethered a short distance off.

"Don't let them escape!" shouted Frank, rushing from behind the rocks. "There are only ten men left!"

"Hurroo?" howled Barney, excitedly. "This makes me think av Donnybrook Fair! Coom back, yez blackguards, an' thread on ther tail av me coat!"

And they charged after their antagonists.

Bang! Bang! Bang! rattled their shots.

The fugitives fired several shots back, but they were so anxious to get away, they dared not linger long enough to take accurate aim.

Leaving one more of their men behind they finally reached their horses, mounted them, and galloped swiftly away.

In this way they effectuated their escape.

Frank paused, and seeing that it was useless to run any further he turned to his friends, and asked:

"Were any of you injured?"

"I've got a ball in my arm," replied Jim.

"Dar's a piece taken out ob my leg," said Pomp.

"An' I have ther laist taste av a cut on me head," added Barney.

"For my part, not a bullet struck me," said Frank. "It is of no use to chase the scoundrels any further. Let us gather up the wounded men and return to the Magnet with them."

This plan was carried out.

Seven men, more or less wounded, were taken.

Having secured them in the turret and attended to their own injuries our friends examined the gun carriage.

She was badly injured.

To repair her permanently was not possible there, but Frank saw that he could so arrange her as to get her to Fort Benton where she could be properly attended to.

Having done this, they boarded her just as day was breaking in the east and proceeded ahead.

Reaching Benton, a physician extracted the ball from Jim's arm, and dressed the wounds of the rest.

It was then Sunday,

"I am going on to the range where Ross agreed to meet the salesman," said Frank to the rest. "You come with me, Pomp. If Ross keeps his engagement we not only may capture the salesman but the outlaw himself."

Leaving Barney and Jim to look out for the Magnet they armed themselves, hired a couple of saddle horses and rode along the road over the Missouri river down to the cattle range into which Shankin Creek flowed.

Then they headed for the rendezvous of the schemers.

## CHAPTER XII.

### MAKING AN ARREST.

It was just noontime when Frank and Pomp cantered up to the cattle range stockade beside the creek.

The corrals, pens, huts and yards were deserted, as the animals that occupied them were off grazing.

Dismounting from their horses in front of one of the huts, they tied the animals, and caught sight of a slender, well dressed young man standing near the pens looking at them.

He had a pale face, a brown mustache, and a very nervous air as he watched the inventor and the coon.

"There he is now," whispered Frank.

"Golly, I wouldn't know him if I see him."

"But you would recognize his voice if you heard it?"

"Fo' shuah," assented Pomp.

"I'll engage him in conversation and you can try."

"Orright, honey—come ahead!"

They strode over to the man and Frank sized him up.

He did not look like a very dangerous person.

Nothing was seen of Ross, and the inventor concluded that the villain had not yet put in an appearance.

"Good-morning, sir," said the young inventor. "Can you tell me where I can find the owner of this place?"

"I'm sorry to say I can't. I am a total stranger here," replied the other, eying the two very sharply.

"How unfortunate. But your face is familiar to me. Where could I have ever met you before?"

"I am sure I don't recognize you," the man answered.

"No? Well, come to think of it I don't believe it is your face as much as your voice that I recognize. Don't you think the gentleman's voice is familiar, Pomp?"

"Yas sah! Yas sah!" the coon replied, energetically. "Dat am it —de voice. Kain't make no mistake 'bout dat. I know dat voice. Dat's de voice I done heard Marse Frank."

Pomp spoke in very positive tones.

It certainly was the same voice he had heard in conversation with Dick Ross when the plan to rob the mail was formed.

Frank saw that his friend was sure of the man.

A look of surprise crossed the stranger's pale face.

"That's a queer way to recognize a man!" he exclaimed.

"It would be under ordinary circumstances," Frank replied.

"Really I can't understand your meaning, sir."

"Then I will explain," laughed Frank, to disarm him of suspicion, and he drew out a pistol and added: "Do you see this weapon?"

"Yes, of course," assented the man, uneasily.

"It is loaded with a bomb-like bullet, and I am considered a good shot. Now if you do not fall instantly upon your knees and raise your hands above your head I will put that ball in your brain."

"What?"

"Obey me—quick!"

"God!" gasped the man, in affright.

And down he sunk and up went his hands.

He read in the expression of Frank's face that it was as much as his life was worth to refuse to obey.

"Now I'll tell you how we recognized your voice," said Frank.

"For pity's sake don't kill me!" implored the man.

"Behave, then! As I was about to say, my friend heard you and Dick Ross plotting in a hut to swindle your employers out of a registered package of jewelry."

"Great Heaven!" moaned the man, in horror.

It now flashed across his mind that he was exposed.

A look of awful suspense distorted his face, and a feverish burning gleam shone in his starting eyes.

"Fortunately," said Frank, "we baffled the robbers when they attacked the train. You are now our prisoner."

"Do not put me in jail!" implored the wretched man.

"We must!" inexorably replied Frank. "It is a menace to the community to allow such a dangerous swindler as you are to roam at large. Pomp, tie him up!"

The coon complied very quickly, and then gagged him.

"Ise gwine ter put him out ob sight in de hut," said he explanatorily. "Mebbe Ross come heah. He won't heah de man talk now. We can lay low an' catch him den."

"Good enough! Put the horses out of sight too then."

They pulled the man into the hut, and having concealed the horses, they returned to their prisoner.

While Pomp remained on guard Frank searched the man, and saw by some papers that were in his pocket, that his name was Charles Seller.

The firm of jewelers in Helena whom he represented was named Ruby, Garnet & Co., and their address was shown.

While Frank was learning all this, they heard the pounding of horses' hoofs some distance away.

"Hark! What's that?" demanded Frank.

"Soun's like's if dey was goin' away," Pomp replied, as he listened.

"Look out. They may be coming."

The coon peered through the doorway.

He located the sound and saw three horses.

"Oh, my Lord!" he gasped. "See heah!"

Frank rushed over to him and looked out.

Upon one of the horses there sat a man, and he was leading away the other two steeds at a gallop.

"Why, it's Dick Ross!" exclaimed Frank in startled tones.

"Yassah, an' he done got our horses!" groated Pomp.

"Now he sees us."

"Oh, golly! Wha' we do now?"

It was clear that the rascal had come to keep his appointment with Seller.

Seeing the two horses in the shed, his suspicions must have been aroused, causing him to run away with them.

As soon as he saw Frank and the coon his fears were confirmed, and he kept on until he vanished in the distance behind the shrubbery bordering the creek.

"That settles it!" exclaimed Frank. "We won't see anything more of him around here now. He has taken our mounts to prevent us following him."

"How yo' gwine ter git back ter Fort Benton?"

"We will have to walk it; we can't help ourselves."



"Gosh! Nineteen miles!" groaned the coon.  
 "Have you got a horse?" queried Frank of the prisoner.  
 "Why, yes," answered the man, as he was relieved of the gag. "I came here in a buckboard. It will carry us."  
 He did not relish the idea of the long walk any more than they did, and on that account vouchsafed this information.  
 "Whereabouts is it?"  
 "In the stockade."  
 "Pomp, get it."  
 "Yo' bet I will," chuckled the coon.  
 And off he ran, whistling a lively tune.  
 Presently he drove up to the door with the vehicle.  
 They lifted the prisoner in and then drove away.  
 It was late in the afternoon when they reached Fort Benton, and there they put Seller in jail.  
 Frank then called on the postmaster, and told him about the arrest of the salesman.

The registered package had arrived the night before, but as the postmaster had heard about the intended robbery, and the reason of it, he withheld the package.

Seller had evidently not heard of the failure of his plot.  
 Thinking the package had reached the hands of the mail robbers as they planned, he had simply gone to the rendezvous to get the \$1,000 Ross promised to pay him.

On the following morning Frank telegraphed to the Messrs. Ruby, Garnet & Co. to come to Benton at once, as an attempt had been made to rob the mails of their jewelry.

Promptly at noon Mr. Ruby met the young inventor at the hotel, and heard the story of the salesman's perfidy.

He was very much horrified and astonished, and thanked Frank over and over again for what he had done.

He recovered the jewelry, and accompanied by an officer, took the salesman back to Helena with him for prosecution.

Frank had made a charge against his seven prisoners, and they were held with the others for trial.

He returned to the Magnet.

Here he found his three companions very busy repairing the damage done to the machine by the dynamite cans.

It required several days' work to put her in order again, but they finally accomplished it.

Boarding her, they drove her out on the plains again, intent upon finding Dick Ross.

One of the prisoners had informed Frank that there were only half a dozen men left of the gang.

Ross yet had the \$50,000 stolen from the Tenth National Bank of San Francisco.

The large denomination of the bills had precluded the possibility of passing them through ordinary channels, and he dared not try at any bank as their numbers were known, and such an attempt would surely lead to his arrest.

In conclusion Frank's informant said that Ross had intimated that as that section of the country was getting too hot for him, he might go on to try his luck along the Great Falls and Canada Central road.

He had made a rendezvous at Rocky Springs near the Blackfeet Indian reservation.

The Magnet was directed to the latter place, and after a long journey reached the settlement.

Night's sable mantle covered the earth when she ran into the village, and our friends found the place in a tremendous furor of excitement.

Wondering what had happened, they stopped the Magnet and shouted at some men who were rushing toward them.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### THE MEN IN THE WOODS.

Rocky Springs was a very small place, frequented by the men from the copper, silver and marble mines of the Sweet Grass Hills.

There was a larger number than usual in the place that night, and they seemed to be wildly anxious for the cars to come along.

"What's the trouble here?" Frank shouted at them.

"The Blackfeet Indians have broken from their reservation," replied one of the panting men. "They made a raid on the mine settlement and killed and scalped several of the men. We ran away while they were plundering the place. Now they are coming for the settlement. God help us when they get here, for there are scores of them and all on the war-path."

"Don't alarm yourselves. We have guns on this machine and will aid you!" cheerily cried Frank.

This assurance assuaged the general alarm.

The miners came crowding around the machine.

Most of them were armed.

A young lady telegraph operator and the depot agent now came out, and joining the families of the inhabitants, they all swarmed to the Magnet.

Having seen her guns, they felt some hope spring up in their despairing hearts.

"Which way are the Indians coming from?" asked Frank.

"The north-east," answered several.

"All of you barricade yourselves in the railway depot. We will go to see what the savages are doing."

This wholesome advice was followed.

As soon as all hands were safely within the building, Frank put on power and the gun carriage rolled away.

Leaving the wheel in Pomp's hands, the young inventor passed out on the platform.

It was a dark, gloomy night.

Heavy banks of rain threatening clouds covered the sky and enshrouded the earth in a black pall.

Pomp turned on the search-light and swept it around.

A thrilling scene met the view of all hands as he did so.

Creeping along the ground toward the village on all sides were scores of the Blackfeet Indians.

They were armed to the teeth.

A general cry arose from them when the light flashed out.

It blinded them, and struck terror to their souls.

Frank sprang into the turret where Barney and Jim stood.

They had loaded the three guns, and were waiting for orders.

"Do you see them?" asked Frank.

"Yes! Yes!" was the reply of both.

"Each of you man a gun and fire."

This order was scarcely given when three thuds of air ensued and three cylinders flew out in three directions.

When they burst the simultaneous reports were terrible.

A large number of the Indians were wounded and killed.

"Turn her around, Pomp, and stop her!" called Frank.

"Yassah!" came the answer.

And around the Magnet swiftly turned.

That revealed the redskins on the other side of the settlement, and as the guns were loaded once more a second volley was discharged with more disastrous effect than the first.

A wild howl arose upon all sides.

The redskins beat a retreat.

"It won't do to run after them," said Frank. "If we leave the village unguarded on one side the villains will swoop down behind us and attack the people in the depot."

The rest agreed with this view.

For several hours nothing was seen of the Indians.

Then Pomp suddenly yelled:

"Say dar! Am dose shootin' stahs, Massa Frank?"

The inventor peered out.

Through the air a number of fiery darts were flying toward the depot, and struck the roof and sides.

There they remained and burned luridly.

"Arrows, with firebrands attached!" cried Frank. "They must have seen that the depot was full of people, and design to burn the building down around them to kill its inmates."

"Be heavens, they're firin' yet!" roared Barney, excitedly.

"We'll drive them back with the guns."

"Good!" cried Jim, "and there's no time to lose."

"Pomp, run back for the depot."

"Lord amassy, it am burnin' up, Marse Frank."

"If we don't get there soon its inmates will either roast to death or get shot the moment they emerge."

The darky put on power, and away the Magnet rushed for the depot, out of which the inmates were driven by the heat.

They did not get the gun carriage there any too soon, for the redskins had come swarming toward the place with a rush and were bent upon the destruction of the whites.

Around the machine rushed to bring her guns to bear on the savage horde, and around the search-light swung till its beams flooded the Blackfeet with light.

Once more the guns belched their destructive projectiles, and in the lurid glare of the explosions our friends could see a number of the savages blown to pieces flying up in the air.

This discharge so filled the redskins with dread of the Magnet and fear of the besieged people, that they sped away and were not seen around there again.

The railroad depot burned to the ground.

All night long the people waited anxiously, expecting an attack at every moment.

It did not come, however.

In the morning they saw what terrible havoc was done with the guns, and realized that the savages had gone away not to return.

Messengers were dispatched to Shelby Junction for help, and Frank finally drove the machine away, assured that the people were safe until assistance arrived.

The Magnet ran on to Sweet Grass, and inquiries were made there for information about Dick Ross.

No one had seen anything of him or his gang.

A run was then made for Piegan in the south, and the magnetic gun carriage reached there at nightfall.

She paused beyond the settlement and Frank started afoot for the place along the railroad track.

He intended to make inquiries here.

A south bound train stood at the depot taking on some freight and baggage.

When the young inventor drew closer to the train, he saw the express messenger alight.

The man lived in a small cottage near the depot on the border of a small woods.

He had ten minutes to spare and as was his custom, he started for the cottage to get his supper basket.

Frank saw the man coming toward him.

He had only gained half the distance to his home, however, when the bushes parted behind him, and a man suddenly sprang out and dealt him a blow on the head.

Frank was startled.



He rushed forward to save the man.  
The brutal wretch who struck the blow saw him coming.  
Turning around he plunged into the woods and sped away.  
Resolved to capture the wretch the inventor dashed after him, but he had not gone far in the gloomy woods when he realized that he had been lured into an ambush.  
Several men sprang upon him.  
While two of them pinioned his arms, another one clapped a cloth saturated with chloroform to his nostrils.  
Frank fought fiercely.  
He could not tear himself away.  
It was impossible to hold his breath for any protracted length of time, and he was therefore forced to breathe the drug.  
He did not inhale as much of it as his captors imagined, but had taken in quite sufficient to stupefy him.  
Collapsing, he fell to the ground partially unconscious.  
His captors had no time to lose, and dashed away.  
It was nearly ten minutes afterwards ere Frank recovered his senses, staggered to his feet, and recalled what occurred.  
He found himself alone.  
He had not even been robbed.  
Wondering what it all meant, he ran back to where he had left the express messenger.  
He found the man, stripped of his cap and uniform, lying upon the ground, just recovering from a terrible beating.  
"In Heaven's name, who did this?" panted Frank.  
"I don't know," groaned the messenger, getting up.  
"What has become of your clothing?"  
"The men who tackled me took it."  
"What for?"  
"One of them put the suit on."  
"He did? What for?"  
"That's more than I can say."  
"What did he do then?"  
"I saw him board my train."  
"But the train is gone."  
"Yes. It just left. There's the clothing the fellow took off of himself to put on my uniform."  
He pointed at a heap of clothing lying on the ground.  
Frank picked them up and glanced at the things, when a startled cry pealed from his lips.  
"Why, these are the things Dick Ross wore when last I saw him!" he exclaimed. "I see through it now. The mail robbers were here, and tackled you so Ross could put on your suit, pass for the express messenger, and thus rob the mails."  
Frank had correctly surmised the scheme his enemies had just put in operation.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## CONCLUSION.

THE express messenger was very much startled by what Frank said, and cried excitedly:  
"You know who my assailants were then?"  
"Yes, a gang of mail robbers. Perhaps I can overtake that train before it reaches the next station, prevent Ross from passing for you in your uniform, and catch him ere he can steal any of the mail bags."  
"That train is making twenty-five miles an hour, and already has been gone a few minutes."  
"Never mind. I've got an engine that can make sixty miles an hour, and I'm going to catch him in spite of the lead he has got. You go home and get some clothes, or put on these duds which Ross left behind."  
And leaving the man wondering what he meant, Frank dashed away to the place where he had left the Magnet.  
Hastily boarding her he told his friends what had happened, and started her off after the train.  
It was a cloudy night, and the hour was eight.  
There was a good road beside the track, and the Magnet flew along like the wind.  
She was soon making fifty miles an hour, and the coon and the Irishman stood in the window forward and kept a keen look out ahead.  
On, on she rushed furiously.  
Mile after mile was passed over, and presently the rear light of the train they were chasing was seen ahead.  
Frank put on every bit of power then, and ten miles more an hour were added to the speed of the Magnet.  
Collins was the next station at the fork of the Teton river where Muddy and Gravel Bottom Creeks branched off.  
But the train was not to stop there.  
She kept right on and reached the bridge.  
Up to her rushed the magnetic machine, and just as she reached the middle of the bridge the Magnet reached her.  
The train had slackened speed upon running on the bridge, and Frank rushed out on the forward platform.  
At that moment there sounded a grinding crash under the two flying engines.  
The bridge was breaking under the Magnet.  
A thrill of horror passed over her occupants as one of the wheels went through the parting planks and held her.  
"Jump for your lives!" Frank screamed.  
Pomp shut off power and rushed out.

He sprang off, followed by Barney and Jim.  
Frank saw the train leaving him behind.  
He gave a leap, and his fingers closed on a bar of the rear railing, when he was dragged with the train.  
No sooner had the train reached solid ground when the bridge gave away, and down into the stream below plunged the Magnet.  
There she disappeared forever beneath the water.  
Barney, Pomp and Jim saved their lives by diving into the stream and swimming away.  
In the meantime Frank hauled himself upon the rear platform on the train, and was carried along with it toward Collins.  
All of the people upon the train were peering back at the broken bridge and thanking heaven that they had not gone down with it.  
As the bridge keeper would attend to the safety of the trains that crossed after that, there was no need for the mail train to stop, so it continued on.  
Frank passed inside.  
Meeting the conductor he told him what had happened.  
"Apprise every one on the train," said he. "We will stop the cars, get into the baggage car and capture Dick Ross. You will then see that I have told the truth."  
The conductor assented to this.  
A few minutes afterward every one of the train hands were apprised of what Frank had said.  
The conductor stopped the train.  
When it paused they all swarmed out around the baggage car and rapped on the door for admittance.  
For a few moments no attention was paid to the rap, but when Frank repeated it the door was opened.  
There stood Dick Ross, attired in the express messenger's uniform, carrying a lantern in his hand.  
It was easy to be seen that the rascal had been busy rifling the mail pouches.  
Frank leveled a pistol at his head, and cried:  
"Hands up, Dick Ross, or you are a dead man!"  
The rascal was amazed to see the inventor there and startled to find himself trapped.  
"Good Heaven!" he gasped, as he gave a violent start.  
"Up with your hands, I say."  
"Yes—yes—yes!"  
And up they went over his head.  
He saw that every one of the trainmen who had a revolver had it pointed squarely at him.  
Escape was utterly out of the question.  
"Go up and bind him!" said Frank to a brakeman.  
The man obeyed.  
In a few moments Ross was helpless.  
Frank then entered the car and searched him.  
In his breast pocket there was a large wallet which contained fifty one-thousand dollar bills.  
Frank took them.  
They were very likely the ones stolen from the Tenth National Bank of San Francisco.  
"Ross, you have reached the end of your rope," said Frank. "Your gang are nearly all in my power, and now you will share their fate."  
"If ever I get out of this hole, I pay you off!" growled the man in bitter tones.  
"It will be years hence, I'm afraid."  
"Don't you be too sure—"  
"Say!" shouted one of the conductors just then. "Here comes three men running up the track signaling to us."  
Frank peered out the door.  
He saw they were Barney, Pomp and Jim Fay.  
Nothing was seen of the magnetic gun carriage, and the gravest fears assailed the young inventor.  
"Hold the train until they reach us!" he exclaimed.  
A few minutes afterward the three panting and puffing men rushed up to the cars and saw Frank.  
"The Magnet is lost!" cried Jim, the first thing.  
"Lost?" gasped Frank with a start.  
"Yes—fell through the broken bridge into the water."  
"Can't she be recovered?"  
"I'm afraid not."  
"How unlucky!"  
"Got Ross?"  
"Yes. Look at these bills."  
The inspector compared them with some numbers he had written in a memorandum book, and said finally:  
"It is the identical money stolen from the Tenth National Bank of San Francisco in transit by mail."  
"Good! I took it from the prisoner there."  
"All aboard!" shouted a conductor just then.  
He wanted to start the train.  
It was soon speeding away again with our four friends and the prisoner.  
"Taking it for granted that I can't recover the engine," said Frank. "We will let her lie buried under the river. As Ross' gang is broken up, we have no further use for it."  
"No, but it's a great loss," said Jim.  
"Be heavens, we'll build another wan," said Barney.  
"Golly! yes," assented Pomp. "Dat's a fact, honey."  
The train carried them to Great Falls and from there they went to Helena with their prisoner.



Every one of the gang were imprisoned here now, and Dick Ross was put behind the bars.

The California bank received back its money.

In due time Dick Ross and his gang were tried for their offenses, found guilty, convicted and sentenced.

Not until they were thus disposed of did Frank and his companions leave Helena.

Their work was then finished in Montana.

The most dangerous gang of mail thieves who ever infested that State was broken up.

Dick Ross' father was duly exonerated from the suspicion of complicity in the crime, discharged honorably from custody and reinstated in his position in the post-office.

The big inspector returned to Washington, and Frank, Barney and Pomp returned to Readestown.

Ultimately they received the compensation due to them, and devoted it to the construction of another invention, the idea of which occurred to Frank upon his return home.

The new contrivance was destined to be a most wonderful affair, and they were soon busily employed at putting it together.

A series of the most startling adventures befell the three friends when they put the machine into use.

We will soon show our readers what they were in another story about Frank Reade, Jr.

Having finished this narrative, we will now bid the inventor, the Celt and the darky adieu.

[THE END.]

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